THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine®

02057

160 pages

AUGUST 1977 $1.00

ALL-NEW ISSUE
14 stories

Michael Gilbert

Ec… D.
H…
Ja…
Ri…
Th…
W…
Ch… na Brand

and EQ's Mystery Newsletter

27 43 4528 ROY466TRH-2 MAY79
PROF HALSEY ROYDEN
13466 THREE FORKS
LOS ALTOS HLS CA 94022

A DAVIS PUBLICATION

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If you have the courage — mail this coupon, and

EXTRA COUPON ON PAGE 30

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE
P.O. BOX 2640, GREENWICH, CONN. 06830

☐ Send me 8 issues of AHMM for $5.97
(In Canada and all other countries $6.70)
☐ Payment enclosed. ☐ Bill me.
☐ Send me 12 issues (1 year) for $8.97
(In Canada and all other countries $10.00)
☐ I enclose payment and receive 2 BONUS ISSUES (14 in all).
☐ Bill me. I forfeit the BONUS ISSUES.

name (please print)

address

city

state zip

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery of your first copy.

H7H017

you'll get more than you bargained for in all new stories presented by the master of suspense.

NOW IN ITS 20TH YEAR!

First published in 1957, ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE, a family magazine, continues to entertain thousands month after month. You'll find in every issue at least ten new stories, including a novelette, each guaranteed to thrill you and chill you. And you'll delight in the famous Hitchcock twist ending.

Subscribe today! Your copies will be delivered to your doorstep.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Next Issue on Sale August 2

ELLERY QUEEN'S *Mystery Magazine* ®

THE LAST TENANT	Michael Gilbert	6
THE CRIME OF THE CENTURY	R. L. Stevens	23
THE VOICE OF DOREEN GRAY	William Bankier	31
THE GRASS WIDOW	Florence V. Mayberry	39
THE SEED CAPER	Jack Ritchie	55
THE PERFECT MAID	Cheryl Reimold	62
THINGS THAT HAVEN'T HAPPENED	Peter Reimold	69
THE MAN WHO LIKED NOISE	Ernest Savage	75
TO HEAL A MURDER	Peter Godfrey	89
THE FINAL TEST	Isak Romun	101
MY FATHER KNOWS YOUR NAME	Ann Mackenzie	114
MR. BOUNTIFUL	Thomas Walsh	123
UPON REFLECTION	Christianna Brand	136
NO HOLIDAY FOR CAPTAIN LEOPOLD	Edward D. Hoch	142
MYSTERY NEWSLETTER	Otto Penzler & Chris Steinbrunner	106
THE JURY BOX	Jon L. Breen	109

PRESIDENT & PUBLISHER: *Joel Davis* EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 70, No. 2, Whole No. 405, AUG., 1977. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at $1.00 a copy. Annual subscription $14.00 in U.S.A. and possessions. In Canada and all other countries $16.00. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 229 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10003. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 2600, Greenwich, Ct. 06830. Second-class postage paid at N.Y., N.Y., and additional mailing offices.

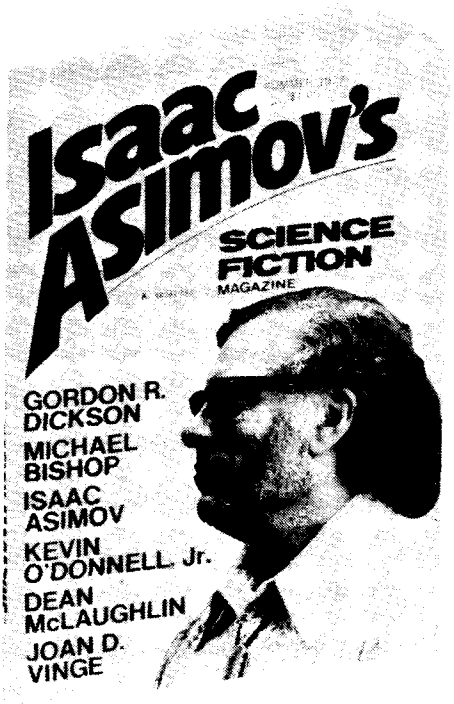
© 1977 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE® is the registered trademark of Ellery Queen. Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope, the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.

ELEANOR SULLIVAN, *Managing Editor* — CONSTANCE DIRIENZO, *Exec. Sec., Rts & Perm. Mgr.* VICTOR C. STABILE, *Vice Pres. & Treas.* — LEONARD F. PINTO, *Vice Pres. & General Manager* JIM CAPPELLO, *Advertising Mgr.* — CARL BARTEE, *Production Dir.* — IRVING BERNSTEIN, *Art. Dir.* DON GABREE, *Newsstand Circ. Dir.* — R. V. ENLOW, *Sub. Circ. Dir.* — EUGENE S. SLAWSON, *Sub. Circ. Mgr.* B. G. DAVIS, *President, Chairman of the Board (1957—1972)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It's new! And it's from Isaac Asimov!

The Science Fiction magazine you've been waiting for —by the most respected and prolific writer in the field. Published quarterly. The most and best in SF in every issue you could expect. And you'd expect that from Asimov.



Four-issue subscription delivered to your doorstep—now for only $4.00.

TO: ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE EQMM 877
Box 1855 GPO, New York, NY 10001

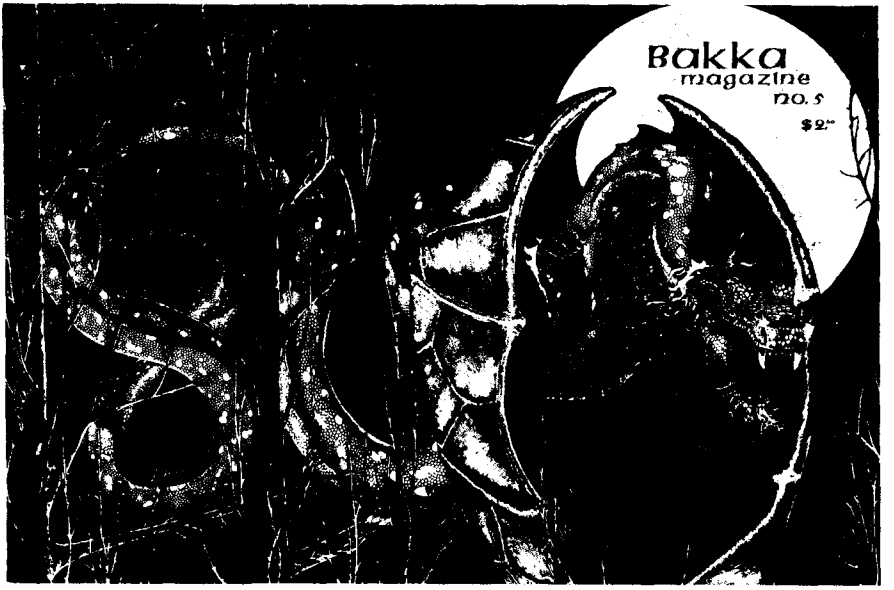
☐ **I enclose $4.00 (includes shipping and postage) for 4 issues of ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE. (In Canada and all other countries, $5.00)**

Name (please print)

Address

City State Zip

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



.....life just draggin' on? ....get this!

This is your notice of BAKKA MAGAZINE #5! For only $2.00, you can get a labour of love from the madmen of the Bakka Bozo Box. Number 5 is a special tribute to our new mystery shop and comes on the eve of the fifth birthday of the SF & F shop. So you can expect much more than number 4 -- 168 pages, to be exact! Full of articles, stories, art and book listings. You'll hear from new voices like Luther Norris of the Pontine Press, Judith Merril, T. Brennan (Marvel, etc.); new reviews of SF, mystery and horror, and mucho more. Also, you'll be awed by the old voices of Elwy Yost, Don Hutchison, Derek Carter, Ronn Sutton and the rest of the gang. The topper is our full, wrap-around cover by Rob Macintyre. The publication date for this 8 1/2 by 11 inch production is set for April 1st, 1977. So don't fool around -- this is really gonna blow your tubes!

SEND
$2.00 cheque or money order

TO

BAKKA SF Book Shop,
282 - 286 Queen Street West,
Toronto, Ontario,
M5V 2A1.

BAKKA II Mystery Book Shop,
834 Yonge Street,
Toronto, Ontario,
M4W 2H1.

the mystery and sf mail-order catalog!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Petrella story by

MICHAEL GILBERT

Detective Chief Inspector Patrick Petrella has a philosophy of crime detection that is worth repeating: "Most police work is knowledge—knowledge of an infinity of small, everyday facts, unimportant in themselves, deadly when taken together." Case in point: the investigation of the Last Tenant which, in the end, became almost a Compleat Catalogue of Crime . . .

The third story in this new series, "Mutiny at Patton Street," will appear in the next issue of EQMM. Don't miss it!

THE LAST TENANT

by *MICHAEL GILBERT*

Fred Jury and Johnny Tredgett would have described themselves, if they had thought of the word, as seasonal workers. They were prepared to tackle any job which called for muscle rather than brain power. Sorting and humping packages at the Crossways Goods Depot was their favorite occupation for the cold wet months of winter and early spring. With the turn of the year they liked to be out and about. They were not skilled enough to tackle the more sophisticated building trades, but there was always rough work to be done—demolition, rubble shifting, drain laying and foundation digging. The local foremen knew them for good workers, with the bonus of a head for heights. They were seldom out of a job for long.

On this lovely April morning they were perched on a remnant of brick wall, 60 feet above the pavement, demolishing what had once been a snug little turret room at the top of a block of offices at the corner of Endless Street and Barton Street.

All that was left of the inner wall of the room was a fireplace with an imitation marble mantelshelf painted dark green and a

© 1977 by Michael Gilbert.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mirror set in the wall above it. The three outer walls had already been demolished.

"Be a bit careful with that," said Fred. "Personally, I could use it myself. Go nicely in the front room."

Johnny slid the point of his pick into the plaster beside the mirror. A lump came away but there was solid brickwork behind the plaster.

"Odd old way to fix a mirror," he said. He probed again. More plaster fell. The glass remained immovable.

He said, "If we can't shift her we'd better bust her, right? Don't want to be all day about it."

"Of course," said Fred, "if you're looking for seven years' bad luck, go ahead and bust it. Don't mind me. Just go right ahead. Bust it."

"That's a lot of bull, that bad-luck malarkey," said Johnny, but he lowered his pick.

"My Uncle Arthur smashed a big looking glass. Just after the war. Nothing went right for him after that. First his brother died. Then he got into trouble with the National Insurance for trying to steam the stamps off his brother's card and stick them onto his own."

Fred, who had started scratching away at the other side of the mirror, said, "Take a look at that, will you."

The glass, it was now clear, was set in an iron frame. It was clear too why they had been unable to shift it. The frame was hinged to a metal upright which was itself set in the brickwork. He said, "It's a sort of cupboard door really. The catch must be on your side."

Some more careful work with the point of the pick and the secret of the mirror was revealed. A small square of wood, painted the same color as the plaster, came away. Under it was a keyhole in the iron frame.

"All we've got to do," said Johnny, "is get those bricks loose. We won't have no more trouble then."

It took ten minutes to loosen the bricks all round the frame. Then they started to lever it out. As they did so, the foreman who had climbed up behind them said, "What are you two layabouts playing at? You ought to have had the whole wall down by now. God Almighty!"

He was staring at something Fred had picked out of the brick-lined cavity behind the looking-glass door. . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Detective Chief Inspector Petrella was walking to work. It was exactly a mile from his new flat to Patton Street Police Station and in fine weather the walk made a good start to a day most of which had to be spent inside his office. He was humming to himself as he walked. It wasn't just the weather. The wheels of existence seemed, for once, to be turning smoothly. There were encouraging reports on the progress of young-Petrella-to-be. A girl, this time, he felt sure.

The rougher elements in his district seemed to have declared an armistice for the moment. There was enough petty crime to keep them all from getting bored, but nothing which called for lengthy reports to Division. He had no reason to suppose that this happy state of affairs would last, but his years in the police service had taught him to live in the present.

In the charge room three men were awaiting his arrival, under the eye of Station Sergeant Cove. Two were tough, cheerful youngsters in their working clothes. The third was an older man, a foreman he guessed. Stacked on the counter was a pile of cardboard boxes.

"Thought you might like to look at this little collection," said Sergeant Cove. "These boys just brought it along."

The largest of the boxes, an open shoe box, was crammed with banknotes, ones and fives in bundles.

"Haven't counted them yet," said Sergeant Cove. "But there must be more'n a thousand nicker there, wouldn't you say?"

"A lot more than that, I should guess," said Petrella. He eased one of the bundles of fivers out of the box. They were packed so tightly that it was difficult to get them out. There were 40 notes in that bundle. Fred and Johnny watched him hungrily.

"Two hundred here. Must be three or four thousand altogether. What's in the other boxes?"

"Valuables," said Fred.

"Joolery," said Johnny.

It was good run-of-the-mill stuff. Gold chains and knickknacks. Rings set with small diamonds and rubies. Wrist watches. Gold pens and pencils. Lighters, cigar cutters. Everything looked new and unused. There was a necklace made out of linked gold coins that Petrella seemed to remember.

He said to the foreman, "We'll have to check these things in our lists. I've got a feeling that necklace is part of the stuff that was lifted from Adamson's last month. You did quite right to bring it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

along. We'll list it and give you a receipt."

The foreman said, "If any of it should be unclaimed, it was these boys who found it. They were knocking down the back wall of the very top room—"

"Easier to show me than talk about it," said Petrella. "Come on." The truth was he was glad of an excuse to get out into the sunshine again.

Then minutes later he was wondering if he had been sensible. He had a fair head for heights. The real trouble was that there was nothing to hold onto.

"Easier if you sit down," said the foreman sympathetically.

"How on earth you *work* up here," said Petrella.

"Nothing to it, once you get used to it," said Johnny, balancing on a narrow ledge of brickwork and holding his pick in one hand.

After a minute Petrella felt better. He hauled himself up onto his feet, edged foward, and peered into the cavity over the fireplace.

"How do you suppose it worked?" he said.

"Small square of wood," said Fred. "Fitted into the plaster, over the lock. Pick it out and undo the lock, always supposing you had the key. Then the mirror swings open."

It was a neat job and the steelwork looked new. Petrella said, "Who had this office, anyway?"

The foreman scratched his head and consulted his memory. "This'd be the turret room, wouldn't it? Fifth floor. Leo Hinn. Called himself an export agent."

"I wonder what he exported," said Petrella.

Later that morning he asked the same question of Mr. Tasker, the solicitor at the Oval.

Mr. Tasker said he thought it might have been hides or furs or something of that sort. Hinn wasn't a regular client. He'd arranged the renting for him about two years ago. After some searching he found a thin folder of papers. There were two short handwritten notes on flimsy writing paper, with no address at the top and signed with a sort of hieroglyphic seeming to be made up of the letters L and H.

"He always signed his letters like that," said Mr. Tasker. "I had the devil of a job finding out where he lived. I finally tracked him down to a room he rents from a Mrs. Tappin in Pardoe Street. Number 46."

"Did he have a lease?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"On the office, you mean? Certainly not. If you have a lease, you pay stamp duty. He was quite happy with a letter from the landlords telling him he could have the room and what rent he had to pay. I initialed it on his behalf."

"Who are the landlords?"

"At that time it was Fullbright's. A very decent old outfit. When Charlie Fullbright died last year they sold out to Lempard. Rather different sort of type."

"Different?"

"I don't mean bent. An eye to the main chance. All Lempard ever wanted with this particular building was to knock it down. Can't blame him really. Shockingly designed. Full of big hallways and corridors and a lot of air space taken up with turrets and battlements. He reckoned they could put up a modern building on the site with twice the renting area. Offices on top, shops underneath."

"If he wanted to pull it down, I suppose he had to get rid of the tenants first?"

"That's right," said Mr. Tasker. "That's just what he did. It's a technique. You start by buying out the ground-floor tenant. You don't relet. You just allow the ground-floor office to deteriorate. Maybe you board up the windows. The other tenants get a bit edgy. Perhaps another one pulls out. That gives you an excuse to lock up the main entrance. "If there are only three or four tenants left, well, they can use the side entrance. Then the lift goes wrong. Of course, they're going to repair it, but it takes time. So the old gent who has the office on the third floor has to climb the stairs three or four times a day. It's surprising how quickly people take the hint."

"I see," said Petrella. It sounded dirty, but not quite criminal. "And he got them all out."

"He thought he had. Somehow he'd overlooked little Mr. Hinn, tucked away in his turret room. He was easy to overlook. Five foot nothing and no weight at all. As I was saying, Sam Lempard forgot about him. He made all his arrangements to pull the place down, signed up the builders, borrowed the money, and was ready to press the button when someone said, 'Hold on a moment. What about old Hinn? Can't start work while he's there.'

"Talk about a row! He sacked his lawyers. Mellors and Rapp were acting for him at the time. Made out it was their fault, which was a load of nonsense. Then he tried to bully little Mr.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hinn. He wouldn't be bullied. Then he tried to buy him and he wouldn't be bought. Next he served a notice of dilapidation on him. There are agents who specialize in that sort of thing."

He mentioned a name and Petrella nodded. He knew them well.

"That was when Mr. Hinn came to me. I told him to ignore the notice. Tear it up. No court would enforce it. Not with the building in that state and going to be pulled down anyway. He didn't only tear up the notice. Dear me, no. He served a counter-notice on Sam Lempard, under the Landlord and Tenant Act, asking for a new tenancy. Ha! I enjoyed doing that for him."

"You say Lempard sacked Mellors. Who was acting for him?"

Mr. Tasker made a face and said, "Eric Duxford, who else?"

"Who else," agreed Petrella.

"He was in a corner. What with lay-off payments to the builders and interest on the money they'd borrowed, the delay must have been costing him a thousand a week, and old man Hinn could have hung him up for three months, no question. Once the court heard the whole story—which I should have been delighted to tell them—he might even have got a new lease."

"So what did Lempard do?"

"I guess he did the only thing he could. Offered Hinn a really large sum of money. Too big for him to refuse."

"You *guess* that's what happened. But you don't know?"

"I don't know, because that's the last I saw of Mr. Hinn. He cleared out altogether. If you do find him, you might remind him that he hasn't paid my bill yet."

"When I find Mr. Hinn," said Petrella, "I shall have quite a lot of questions to ask him."

Samuel Lempard described himself as a property consultant. He had a handsome set of offices in Kentledge Road with a convenient rear exit into Kentledge Mews, where he kept one of his three cars. This enabled him to dodge importunate or indignant clients.

He seemed unsurprised to receive a visit from Detective Chief Inspector Petrella. Word of what had happened on this building site that morning must already have reached him. He said, "It's a queer do. What do you make of it, Inspector?"

"It's a bit early to be certain," said Petrella. "We haven't had time to check out all the stuff yet. One bit, at least, is on the Recently Stolen List. If it all turns out to be stolen goods, we shall

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have to assume that Mr. Hinn didn't confine his activities to dealing in hides and furs."

"A fence, eh?" said Mr. Lempard. "It doesn't surprise me a lot. He was a shifty one."

"And took a bit of shifting," said Petrella.

Mr. Lempard's face showed a mottled red and Petrella could see the veins in his neck swelling. He said to himself, "By God, he *has* got a temper. He can't think of it, even now, without coming to the boil." The flush subsided slowly. As soon as he could speak Mr. Lempard grunted out, "So you heard about that, eh?"

"I heard about it. And I want to hear more about it."

"Where the hell do the police come into my business?" He was still angry.

"Not your business. Mr. Hinn's business."

Sam Lempard thought about it. Petrella imagined he could read his thoughts. Was there anything in it for him? He'd paid out good money to little Mr. Hinn. There'd been a boxful of notes in the cache behind the mirror. A lot of it was probably his money. Was this a chance to get some of it back?

In the end he said, "I don't see why I shouldn't tell you. You heard how he stuck me up. Straight blackmail. Prompted by Geoff Tasker, I don't doubt. In the end I paid him two thousand quid, in notes, and he signed the necessary document."

"A surrender of his lease."

"That's right. Duxford drew it up. Hinn came round here the same evening and signed it."

"What happened then?"

Mr. Lempard looked surprised. He said, "I don't follow you. He got out, of course."

"But what happened exactly? Did he clear all his stuff out and hand over the keys?"

"Now you come to mention it, that was a bit funny. Duxford and I went round the next morning. We found the door locked."

"So?"

"We broke it down."

"Wasn't that a bit irregular?"

"I don't see it. We'd paid the money. We could do what we liked with the place."

"And the furniture?"

"There were a few sticks there. Not what I'd call furniture." Mr. Lempard looked round complacently at his own massively fur-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nished office. "A desk, two or three chairs, a bookcase with a few trade catalogues in it."

"What did you do with it?"

"We sold it. No point in paying storage charges."

The scholarly Sergeant Ambrose said, "We've placed all the stuff. It's the proceeds of three shop-breakings. We had the proprietors round here with their records and they were able to identify every piece. Adamson's, in the High Street, Alpha Sales in the Cut, and Hingston's. All the watches and pens came from Hingston's."

"You mean we've got it all back?"

"No such luck. About a quarter of Hingston's and a third of the other two."

Petrella thought about it. It was beginning to add up. "The M.O. people tipped Mick the Pat for all those jobs, didn't they?"

"I have the relevant report here," said Sergeant Ambrose. He could always produce the relevant report. Petrella wondered what they were going to do when Sergeant Ambrose was promoted, as inevitably he would be, and removed to an office desk at New Scotland Yard. "It was a definite identification. Method of entry. Timing. Method of neutralizing the alarms."

Petrella grunted. The *modus operandi* files were useful at pointing the finger of suspicion. They were never conclusive enough to justify an arrest. He said, "Mick's a violent character. But I wouldn't have thought he went in for murder."

"Do you think Hinn's dead, then?" said Sergeant Blencowe, who had been listening to the conversation.

"It must be a strong possibility. The first idea was that he'd scarpered. That doesn't hold up. He was fencing Mick's stuff for him. That's clear. If he'd got cold feet and decided to scarper, he might have left the rest of the stuff behind, but he'd surely have taken the money."

"Unless he had to get out so quick he couldn't reach the money. If Mick thought he was being short-changed he'd have been after him with a pick helve."

"For God's sake!" said Petrella. "The money wasn't buried six feet down in the middle of a blasted heath. He'd only got to open his patent looking-glass cupboard and put the stuff in his pockets. I think we'll call on Hinn's last known address. You can come with me, Sergeant."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pardoe Street was composed of small semi-detached houses which had been undistinguished when they were built and were now sliding into slumdom. The door of Number 46 was opened to them by a thin woman wearing an overall and carrying four empty milk bottles impaled on the fingers of her left hand. Mrs. Tappin, Petrella guessed.

He introduced himself and said, "I believe Mr. Hinn had rooms here. I suppose he isn't in just now?"

"Haven't seen him for more'n a month," said Mrs. Tappin. As she spoke she clanked the milk bottles on her fingers like castanets. Sergeant Blencowe watched her, fascinated.

"I suppose you've re-let the room."

"Can't do that. Paid up three months." Clank, clank—

"Then no one's been in it for a month."

"Just his friends."

"Which friends?"

"Two men. Big men." Mrs. Tappin demonstrated their size with a rattle on her castanets.

"I think we'd better have a look round."

"I expect that's right," said the woman. She deposited the milk bottles expertly on the top step. "After all, it's more'n a month. He might be anywhere by now, mightn't he?"

"He might indeed," said Petrella.

Mrs. Tappin led the way up three narrow flights of stairs. The first flight had a carpet on it, the second linoleum, the third nothing at all. She extracted a key from the mysteries of her upper garments and unlocked the door on the left of the landing and opened it. They all looked in.

"His friends seem to have been untidy sort of people," said Petrella mildly.

The place was in chaos. Drawers pulled out, furniture overturned, the carpet rolled back, books tipped out of shelves, pictures wrenched from their frames.

"Well, now," said Mrs. Tappin, "why would they want to do that?" She didn't seem unduly surprised. A life spent renting rooms in Pardoe Street must have made her a difficult person to surprise. She picked up one of the chairs and stood it carefully on its feet. "I expect they were looking for something."

"I guess they were," said Petrella. He took a photograph out of his wallet. "Would that have been one of the men?"

"Could have been. I didn't notice him all that clearly."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Did he have an Irish accent?"

"He might have. I wouldn't want to swear to it in court." . . .

"She recognized him all right," said Sergeant Blencowe. They were back at Patton Street. "She didn't want to say so, in case Mick came back and duffed her up. What a character. I must try it when I get home."

"Try what?"

"Playing tunes with milk bottles. Amuse the kids."

"You're not going to have much time for playing with your kids in the near future," said Petrella. "You're going to do a checkup on Mr. Hinn. Former places of work, family, pubs and eating places he used. Have a word with the Social Security. And try the Russian Orthodox Church down in Little Baltic. It's a long shot but Tasker said his family originally came from Lithuania or someplace like that. You know the form."

Sergeant Blencowe agreed, gloomily, that he knew the form. It was not that he objected to hard work. But he knew Little Baltic, a huddle of factories, slaughterhouses, and skinning shops which stank even in cool weather and were full of men who jabbered in their own unintelligible lingo.

The next thing that happened was the arrival at Patton Street of Mick. Petrella had had dealings with him before and had once described him as honestly dishonest. He was a huge man (by Mrs. Tappin's units of measurement ten milk bottles in height and eight round the waist). He maintained a large family by his efforts at shop-breaking, being, for all his bulk, remarkably clever with his fingers and adept at inserting himself through the smallest of gaps. Sergeant Roughead brought him up. He said, "Mick wants to see you, Skipper. He thinks we've got some property which belongs to him."

"It's the money you found, if it's the truth I've been told, at the premises of Mr. Hinn."

"Quite true," said Petrella. "We did find some money there. Quite a lot of money. You say it was yours?"

"He was minding it for me."

"Was he minding the other things as well?"

"Now what other things would those be?" said Mick, looking at Petrella out of guileless eyes of Irish blue.

"One or two little trifles. Someone seems to have removed them from jewelers' shops without going through the formality of paying for them."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The world is full of dishonest craytures," said Mick. "I wouldn't know anything about that sort of thing. It's the money I was interested in."

"Have you any sort of proof it belonged to you?"

"Something in writing, you mean. Mr. Hinn couldn't write his own name. It's a known fact."

"If there's nothing in writing—" said Petrella. Mick made a very slight movement with his head. Petrella understood it. He said, "That'll be all for now, Sergeant." Sergeant Roughead removed himself unwillingly. He was a student of human nature and Mick was one of his favorite characters.

When the door had closed and Sergeant Roughead's footsteps had died away down the passage, Mick leaned forward, his large hands on Petrella's desk, and said softly, "If you'd care to spend five hundred pounds of that money."

"What would I buy with it?" said Petrella just as softly.

"I'll sell you the Pole."

Detective Superintendent Watterson said, "He's got a nerve. Five hundred pounds."

"For the Pole."

"For the Pole," agreed Watterson.

The Pole, sometimes referred to as Augie the Pole, was a man that both Watterson and Petrella would have given a lot of money to put away.

Neither of them had ever set eyes on him. He was a denizen of Little Baltic. He was an unknown quantity. He was a name. It was a name which a number of people had cause to loathe and to fear.

There had been protection rackets before. Shopkeepers and restaurant proprietors had sometimes paid sums of money under threat that their premises would be dismantled if they refused. More often they had jibbed and asked for police protection. This had led, sooner or later, to a noisy finale and the temporary closing down of the racket.

The Pole did not attack premises. He attacked families. Your wife was alone in the house while you went out to work. Did you fancy coming home at night and finding her unconscious on the floor with two black eyes and a broken rib? Or maybe you had children. Odd things could happen to children, particularly to young girls.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One or two people had complained to the police. Nothing had happened to them, or their families, for several months. The Pole was a patient man. Then he had sent out two of his countrymen. They came in the early dusk, wearing silk-stocking masks and carrying ax handles or cleavers and they broke up things and people.

How many preferred to pay? Petrella had no means of knowing. The Pole never appeared himself. He sent his friends. Their best hope was that someday they would catch one of them red-handed and he might be induced to talk.

"If Mick could put a finger on him," said Petrella, "and give us some solid evidence, it would be worth paying for."

"Paying for, certainly," said Watterson. "But five hundred pounds!" Petrella knew that the pounds disbursed to informers were counted in tens and twenties. Twenty-five was the most he had ever paid out himself.

"It's not as though it was coming out of police funds," said Petrella.

Watterson said, "That's all very well. Sooner or later someone's going to lay claim to that money. We can't just throw it around as if it belonged to us."

The next claimant arrived that afternoon, in the form of a stout little lady, tightly cased in old-fashioned black. She had read the story of Fred Jury and Johnny Tredgett's discovery. She was, she said, the lawful and only wedded wife of Leopold Hinn. She laid her credentials on the table. They seemed to establish her identity.

She had parted from Leopold some years before, but there had been no divorce. Therefore he could not lawfully have married again. Therefore, if he was dead, and had left no will, all his goods belonged to her.

Petrella said, "There are two difficulties. The first is that we don't know that he's dead. The second is that we have no means of being certain that the money you are talking about belonged to him."

"Of course it belonged to him," said Mrs. Hinn. "It was found behind a looking glass in his office. It said so in the newspaper."

"Certainly. But he had been there for less than two years. It could have been left there by a previous tenant."

Mrs. Hinn said, "You are talking nonsense. No one would leave such money behind them, unless they were dead. I shall speak to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a lawyer. He will make you give me the money."

A further claimant announced himself by telephone on the following morning. It was Samuel Lempard. He said, "I've been talking to my solicitor. In fact, he's here with me now. He says that when Hinn gave up—what's that?" Petrella could hear someone prompting him in the background. "Surrendered, yes. When he surrendered the lease he specifically surrendered the contents of the office as well. He's reminded me, that's how we were able to sell the furniture."

"And the document he signed actually says that?"

"In black and white."

"Have you got it there?"

"Right on my desk."

"I'd better come and look at it," said Petrella.

He was on the point of leaving when Sergeant Blencowe appeared. He said, "We've had a get-well card."

It was a dirty piece of paper, in a dirty envelope. The words on the paper had been printed in capital letters, in purple ink. It said, "Mick keeps his stuff in his mother's house in Gosport Lane. It's under the coal in the shed at the end of her garden."

Holding it in his hand, Petrella walked across to one of his filing cabinets and took out a folder. It contained half a dozen letters, all on dirty scraps of paper, all printed in capital letters in purple ink. They were threatening letters which the recipients had brought round to Patton Street.

"It's the Pole all right," said Sergeant Blencowe. "If he's shopping Mick, he must have known Mick was ready to shop him. When thieves fall out, eh?"

"Check up on that coal shed first. You'll need a warrant. If you find the goods there, pull Mick in." He thought about Mick. "You'd better take a driver and another man with you."

"Mick won't give no trouble. But if the stuff is on his mum's premises, not on his, how are we going to charge him?"

Petrella said, "He won't let his mother stand the racket. He's fond of her."

He was thinking about Mick as his driver inched the car through the thick traffic in Kentledge Road. He was thinking about the two brothers, nearly as big as Mick, and about the small white-haired woman who was the mother of the three. He had a weakness for the Irish. He wished they had taken up Mick's offer when he made it and gone after the Pole. It would have been

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a lot more satisfactory that way round.

The policeman on point duty recognized the car and held up the traffic for them while they turned into Kentledge Mews. They squeezed in behind a large blue station wagon parked in front of an unmarked door which, Petrella assumed, led up to Mr. Lempard's office. The door was locked.

He walked round to the front of the building and took the elevator up to the first floor. Here he found Mr. Lempard and, lounging in a chair in front of the electric fire, his legal adviser, Eric Duxford.

"Good of you to come round," said Mr. Lempard. "Have a drink?"

"Not just now."

"Show him the paper, Duxford."

Eric Duxford uncoiled himself from the chair. He had a long white face, made longer by a pointed beard. He smiled thinly at Petrella. He had been a thorn in the flesh of the South London police for 20 years.

"I think the wording is quite clear," he said. "It's at the top of page two. 'In consideration of the remission of any rental then due and a release from all obligations arising from his tenancy or occupation of the room on the fifth floor of Radnor House in Endless Street, the tenant surrenders to the Landlord the said room and all fixtures, fittings, furniture, and other contents thereof.' "

Petrella took the document across to the window and read it through slowly. He was particularly interested in the last page, which was some inches shorter than the other two. Ignoring Mr. Duxford's outstretched hand, he walked across to Mr. Lempard, holding the paper so that only the last page was visible and said, "You say that Mr. Hinn signed this in your office one evening."

"So he did."

Petrella could see the telltale flush creeping up again.

"And I see that you witnessed his signature."

"That's right."

"Which means that you actually saw him writing his name."

"That's right."

"Then why hasn't he done so?"

There was a moment of absolute silence. Mr. Duxford said, "I don't understand you, Inspector—"

Petrella swung round on him and said savagely, "I advise you to keep out of this," and swung back on Mr. Lempard.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm going to ask you once again, and I advise you to be very careful about what you say. Did Mr. Hinn sign this document in your presence?"

Mr. Lempard seemed to be finding some difficulty with his breathing. In the end he said, in a voice so thick that they could scarcely make out the words, "Of course he did. I told you."

Petrella pointed to the straggling letters "L. Hinn," stretching in an almost illiterate scrawl across the paper. He said, "I suppose you thought that was how Mr. Hinn would write his name."

"Really, Inspector," said Eric Duxford. "I'm not sure what you're insinuating. It's well known that he was practically illiterate—"

"All that was known about him," said Petrella, "was that he chose to initial documents with a personal hieroglyphic. Quite a common practice in some countries. When he *did* have to write his name on an official paper, for instance, he was perfectly capable of doing so." As he spoke he was laying on the desk in front of the lawyer the documents which Mrs. Hinn had produced. These were a form of application to the Home Office for naturalization dated two years previously, a ten-year-old passport in their joint names, and a certificate of marriage. Mr. Duxford stared at them, his face nearly as white as his client's.

"You will observe," said Petrella, "that not only does he write his name in a characteristic but perfectly legible hand, but he also spells it in the Nordic way, Hynn."

Both men looked at Mr. Lempard, but he seemed to be incapable of speaking.

Petrella said, "I must warn you that a very serious charge may be made against you. A charge of forgery. Mr. Duxford will advise you about your rights."

Mr. Lempard stared at him without speaking. Petrella could see his lips moving.

"What first gave you the idea that it might be murder?" said Watterson.

"It was a tiny thing," said Petrella. "When I told him he was likely to be charged with forgery, I'll swear his first reaction was relief."

"Try explaining that to a jury."

"And why did he cut off the bottom of the last page? Obviously because there were bloodstains on it."

"Always supposing he did cut it off."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And look at those two tiny spots, close to the signature. There. One of them looks almost like a full stop. If you hold them up to the light you can see a sort of reddish tinge."

Watterson held the paper up to the light and said, "*If* they're spots of blood the laboratory will tell us quick enough. But suppose they are. What does it amount to? They could have come from a cut finger or a nose bleed. They don't add up to murder."

"I'm not sure that it was murder," said Petrella. "My guess would be that Mr. Hinn agreed to the money that was offered to him—or said he was going to agree. The document was got ready and when he went round to sign it that night he changed his mind. Perhaps he thought he could squeeze a bit more money out of the situation. Lempard's a big man and he's got a hair-trigger temper. I think he hit Mr. Hinn a lot harder than he meant, and found himself with an unsigned document and a dead man on his hands."

"Since you've been gazing into the crystal ball," said Watterson sourly, "perhaps you can tell me what he did with the body?"

"If the first part's right, there's not much doubt about the next bit. He'd pick the little man up, carry him down those private stairs, and put him into the back of the station wagon. He'd need a bit of luck there, but it was dark and there wouldn't be many people about in the Mews at that time of night."

"And then?"

"Drop it in the river, dump it in Epping Forest, bury it in his own garden."

Watterson thought about it. He said, "It's full of ifs and buts and guesswork and precious little hard evidence. I can tell you straight away that the Director won't underwrite a murder charge on the strength of one hunch and two drops of blood." He thought about it some more. Petrella waited patiently. He knew his man.

Finally Watterson grunted and said, "All right. *If* the laboratory says these spots are human blood, we might have enough to justify a few precautionary measures. Lempard's house is in P Division. I could ask Haxtell to have it watched."

"I don't think he'll try to bolt," said Petrella. "He's got too much sense."

Many of his guesses were shortly to be proved right, but on this one he was wrong.

A month later, as proceedings leading to a charge of forgery ground slowly forward, with reports from handwriting experts and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

statements from Mrs. Hinn and others, Lempard decided to leave. He had made a number of discreet preparations and on a rainy night toward the end of April he drove to Heathrow Airport, unaware that a car was following him and that a telephone message had gone before him.

The proceedings at the airport were brisk and, for Mr. Lempard, uncomfortable. He could offer no explanation of why he was carrying £10,000 in Swiss notes under the lining of his suitcase and a quantity of small but very valuable diamonds embedded in two cakes of soap in his sponge bag.

A search warrant was now felt to be justified. The body of little Mr. Hinn was discovered, four foot down, in the rosebed at the foot of Mr. Lempard's well-kept garden and Mr. Lempard was charged with his murder.

Mrs. Hinn's claim to the money was conceded. Grudgingly and after considerable pressure, she gave up ten percent of it to the finders, Fred Jury and Johnny Tredgett, who spent most of it in a celebration party which ended with both of them in the cells of Patton Street Police Station, charged with being drunk and disorderly and assaulting the police.

Petrella took very little part in these final transactions. By that time other matters were occupying his attention fully.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

R. L. STEVENS

The time was June 1885. The place was the harbor of New York. The planned crime was piracy, masterminded by Ragger and his key man, Andy Crews. In Ragger's mind it was "the crime of the century" . . .

THE CRIME OF THE CENTURY

by R. L. STEVENS

Ragger was seated on a wood piling, staring out through the evening mist at the calm beauty of New York harbor, when he heard someone approaching. It could only have been Edith, but he felt his muscles tense nevertheless. He let one hand slide along his waist to the sandbag he carried on his belt, ready to spring to the attack if it should be a policeman or Pinkerton guard assigned to the pier area.

But it was Edith.

"This is a dangerous place at night," she cautioned. "Someone could rob you and toss your body into the water."

"I can take care of myself. I came down here for the view."

"What can you see in all this mist?"

"My girl, I can see a half million dollars."

"A half—"

"I am going to commit the crime of the century—a crime that will put my name in the history books alongside that of John Wilkes Booth."

"You mean you're going to shoot President Cleveland!"

Ragger chuckled at the idea. Cleveland had only been in office three months, since his inauguration on March 4, 1885. "He ain't even had time to make enemies yet, girl!"

"But you won't get into the history books unless you're caught."

© 1977 by R. L. Stevens.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'll write 'em from South America after it's all over and tell them who I am."

"South America? Can I go with you, Ragger?"

" 'Course you can go with me! What do you think I'm telling you about it for?"

"When's all this going to happen?"

"In about ten days, give or take a day. I'm meeting tomorrow with some boys that are goin' to help me. There's lots of plannin' to be done."

"The crime of the century. . . What is it, Ragger?"

"You'll find out soon enough, my girl."

The following evening Ragger and Edith crossed the new bridge to the city of Brooklyn and met four men in a waterfront tavern, gathering in a private upstairs room where they wouldn't be disturbed. One of them, Andy Crews, had been a friend of Ragger's since their Navy days together. The other three were tough-looking seamen anxious to make a crooked dollar. Andy had had little trouble recruiting them for the job.

Ragger looked them over and asked, "What're your names?"

"Haskel," a rough-looking bald man answered.

"Peters." A young one, but already carrying the scars of battle on his face.

"Fernandez." This last from a dark-skinned Spaniard.

"Good. I'm Ragger and this is Edith, my woman. That's all you need to know about us. If the job is successful you'll be paid twenty-five thousand dollars each." He could see their faces light up at the sum. It was as much as they'd normally make in many years.

"Who do we have to kill?" Haskel asked with a grin.

"With luck, nobody. We're going to be pirates. We're going to intercept a ship as she approaches the shore, board her, and remove her cargo."

"What is it—gold bullion?" the young one, Peters, asked.

"Something better than bullion. You'll know when the time comes and not before." He turned to Andy Crews. "What luck have you had with a boat?"

Andy shook his head. "Not good, Ragger. I've got one that can be handled by this small a crew, and it has a good strong winch on board. But have you figured out the timing on this operation?"

Andy Crews was an educated man who worried about things

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like timing. Ragger often scoffed but usually followed his advice. "What about the timing?" he asked with a frown.

"There are two hundred and twenty large crates to be removed from the ship—correct?"

"That's right. That's the word I got from my man who'll be on board."

"Well, the boat I have for us could barely hold one hundred crates on its deck without capsizing. It would have to make two or more likely three trips to the ship—all while we held the crew captive. The thing would take days—just the unloading would take days! And while we went back and forth to shore you'd be virtually alone on the *Isère* with your prisoners."

It was the first time the name of the French ship had been mentioned. Ragger glanced at the three men but he saw at once that the name meant nothing to them. "All right," he said finally. "Any better suggestion?"

"Yes," Crews said. "Instead of my coming with you as originally planned, I could remain on shore. You'd have these three plus your man on board the *Isère* to seize the ship, while Edith held our little cutter alongside. You know my fondness for pigeons. When the ship is secure you could release a pigeon which would fly back to me here at the tavern as a signal."

"Are they trained for that?"

Andy Crews nodded. "I have some trained ones as good as any used during the war. When I receive the signal, I would then announce that the ship's cargo was being held for $500,000 ransom. If the money was not paid at once, we would threaten to scuttle or blow up the *Isère*.

Ragger admitted it made sense. The transfer of the cargo had always bothered him, and this way it could be avoided. "All right," he decided. "It's agreed. But we'll be depending on you. How will you notify us that the ransom has been paid?"

"Your man on the *Isère* is to fire a rocket when the ship is in sight of Sandy Hook. I will do the same. When the money is paid, I will fire a rocket from Sandy Hook—and you can leave the ship."

"With the Revenue Cutter Service in pursuit!" Edith predicted.

"No, I'll take care of that," Andy Crews promised. "I'll say we've left one man on board the ship, to scuttle her if you're pursued. By the time they get out there and find it's not true, we'll all be far away."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The plan sounded good to Ragger. "We'll go look at your boat tomorrow."

"When's this supposed to happen?" Fernandez wanted to know.

"Sometime around a week from Wednesday. June seventeenth. The ship is due about then. We'll have to be out there every day next week watching for her, watching for the rocket signal from my man on board."

Later, after more talk, Ragger ordered drinks for everyone. The scheme that would make him famous was under way, and he had a feeling nothing could stop it.

When the three hired men had gone, Ragger asked Andy Crews, "Are you sure you can trust them?"

"I'm sure. For that much money they'd kill their own mothers."

Ragger downed the rest of his rum. "How about guns?"

"Model 1873 carbines for you and the three of them. Winchesters—the best made. Plus standard issue U.S. Cavalry model revolvers, caliber 44/40, to carry in a belt holster."

"That's Indian-fighting gear!"

"You'll be thankful for it. Those French seamen just might decide to put up a fight. I got you some smoke bombs too, to confuse things when you come alongside."

Ragger chuckled. "Andy, my boy, I'm glad to see you've kept up your contacts with the military."

Some hours later, back at Ragger's dingy two-room apartment on Delancey Street, Edith asked him, "What is it, Ragger? I want to know what it is we're stealing."

"First of all, we're not stealing it—only holding it for ransom. And second, it's best you don't know quite yet."

"Andy knows, doesn't he?"

"Sure, Andy has to know. But nobody else right now."

"How do you know they'll pay a half million for it? I can't think of anything but gold that'd be worth near that much!"

"The contents of those crates are actually valued at $450,000, but I'm sure they'll pay a half million to have it safe and sound."

"How're you splitting the money?"

"Twenty-five thousand to each of those three, like you heard, plus the same to a French seaman named Vascal who's on the ship. Andy's getting one hundred thousand because he's my key man. And that leaves three hundred thousand for you and me and South America."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That must be more money than there is in the world!"

"Oh, there's lots of money in the world for them that can get it. Them with the brains."

The next day they went down to the Brooklyn docks and looked over the boat Andy had selected. It was a cutter like the ones the government used for its coastal patrol, single-masted like a sloop but having the mast farther astern. "A good fast ship," Andy said. "You could probably outrun them with this even if they did decide to chase you."

"Yes," Ragger agreed. "I like it. But I doubt if even a hundred crates would have fit on this deck space. You must have known I'd go along with the change of plan when you picked it out."

"It's the only way that makes sense, Ragger. But the boat's only rented for next week, so there wasn't that much to lose if you overruled me."

"What'd you tell the owner?"

"That we were going deep-sea fishing. Of course he didn't believe me, but he didn't care. Probably figures we're running in illegal aliens or something."

In the wheelhouse Ragger turned to Edith. "Do you think you could handle it while we're on board the *Isère*? Just hold steady alongside in case we have to make a quick exit?"

She tried the wheel. "I think só. Give me some practise while we're out sailing around."

"It might be several hours or even a day," Andy Crews cautioned her. "But once the French crew is subdued and locked up Ragger could relieve you."

For the next few nights they went over the plans again and again, figuring every angle, trying to anticipate every response the police could make. "After I deliver my ransom demand we enter the crucial phase," Andy said. "If they decide to ignore me and order the Revenue Cutters or the Navy after you, we're all in big trouble."

"They won't chance it," Ragger said with assurance. "I'd scuttle the ship and they know it. And that's one thing I'm sure they won't risk. I know how politicians react."

Andy snickered. "You've been reading books."

"And newspapers. I may not be as smart as you, Andy, but I'm no dope an' don't you forget that! This whole scheme was my idea. It's *me* that's goin' down in the history books."

"Along with John Wilkes Booth," Edith remarked.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Now what in hell is gettin' at *you*?"

"Nothing, Ragger, nothing. It's just that you keep harping so much on wanting to commit the crime of the century. Sometimes I think those history books are more important to you than the money!"

"Come on," Andy said. "It won't do us any good to fight among ourselves."

Ragger calmed down. They were both right, of course. He hadn't come all this way with his planning to let it fly out the window. "All right," he said. "We take her out next Monday, armed and ready to go."

Cutting through the early morning mists off Sandy Hook, the boat made better headway than Ragger had expected. "When we get back I'll have to compliment Andy," he told Edith. "It's got speed and it handles well. Want to try the wheel for a bit?"

They traded places and he watched her steering. "I can manage it," she decided.

"Good! You'll do fine."

They cruised back and forth the entire day without catching sight of the ship they awaited. Finally, heading in to the dock in Brooklyn, Edith asked, "You're sure it's due now?"

"Around Wednesday. I just wanted to make sure it didn't arrive ahead of schedule. Vascal has no way to communicate their progress to me."

On Tuesday morning they went out again.

The three in the crew were more at ease this time, and they joked among themselves as the cutter headed east toward the Atlantic shipping lanes. Ragger had a feeling in his bones that this would be the day. He kept his carbine ready while he used a spyglass to scan the horizon for ships.

"I told Andy we might stay out all night and sleep on the boat," he said to Edith. "I can't take a chance on missing the *Isère*."

Edith gave the wheel to Peters and came over to where Ragger stood. "This thing means a great deal to you, doesn't it?"

"Of course! It means we'll be rich."

"We'll be rich if you can trust Andy Crews."

He looked hard at her, seeking some meaning in her spray-swept face. "I'd trust Andy with my life."

"That's just what you're doing, Ragger."

He put down the spyglass. "What are you trying to tell me?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He's planning to collect the half million and take off for South America with all of it."

"That's crazy, I don't believe it!"

She took a deep breath. "He asked me to go with him, Ragger. He wants me to leave you aboard the *Isère* and sail the cutter to Sandy Hook to meet him."

"I don't believe it," Ragger said again.

But somehow he did.

It would be Andy Crews then who had committed the crime of the century, Andy Crews whose name went down in the history books.

"Ragger?"

"We're heading home," he decided suddenly, barking orders at young Peters. "I'll deal with Andy."

It was near evening when the cutter docked, and Ragger headed for the Brooklyn tavern where they had held the first full meeting. He knew Andy Crews would be waiting there for the carrier pigeon that would tell him they had seized the *Isère*.

Andy was in the upstairs room alone. He turned toward the door as Ragger entered, a look of surprise on his face. "What's wrong? What are you doing back here?"

"You know what's wrong, Andy."

Crews saw the carbine in Ragger's hands, and he went for his own gun, screaming in the same instant, "For God's sake, don't shoot! I don't know what you're—"

Ragger fired once, and the bullet toppled Andy Crews backward. Then, suddenly, there was the sound of police whistles. Ragger turned, tried to run, but already the room was filling with men.

The Commissioner of Police looked up from his desk as Edith Murphy entered. He smiled and extended his hand. "That was a fine job you did, Miss Murphy. You forestalled a very serious crime."

She smiled slightly. "The crime of the century, Ragger called it."

"I suppose it might well have been, if they'd gotten away with it. When I assigned you to him six months ago, I never dreamed he was into anything more than some waterfront crime."

"Oh, Ragger had big ideas—there's no doubt of that. But I never thought it would end in murder. I had to get the cutter

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

back to port before the French ship appeared, and that lie about Andy Crews was the only way I could think of."

"Crews was a bad one—he won't be missed. Maybe your lie even had a bit of truth to it. We discovered he had booked a passage to South America. Anyway, the whole thing's much simpler this way. We've charged Ragger with second-degree murder and we're sure of a quick conviction. The business about the *Isère* and its cargo need never come out."

She walked to the window, thinking still of her days with Ragger. "So he'll go to prison for killing a man in a barroom brawl, and his name will be forgotten after all. Not exactly the crime of the century that he planned on."

"No," the Commissioner agreed. "But you'll get a promotion for this, even so. A fine bit of work."

She was staring out toward New York harbor, though she couldn't see it from the window. She was staring as Ragger had stared on that misty night just ten days ago.

The *Isère* had reached Sandy Hook on June 17th, and soon an army of workmen would begin assembling the contents of those 220 large crates.

And one day next year, on an island in the harbor, the Statue of Liberty would be dedicated.

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE TO—
ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

You'll get more than you bargained for!

TO: ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE
Box 2640, Greenwich, Conn. 06830

☐ Send me 8 issues of AHMM for $5.97.
(In Canada and all other countries $6.70)

☐ Payment enclosed. ☐ Bill me.

☐ Send me 12 issues of AHMM (1 year) for $8.97.
(In Canada and all other countries $10.00)

☐ I enclose payment and receive 2 BONUS ISSUES (14 in all).

☐ Bill me. I forfeit the BONUS ISSUES.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

Allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery of first copy.

H7H025

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* detective story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

A unique case—everybody had motive, everybody had opportunity, everybody had the same means, and this is what made it unique—everybody "announced their candidacy for the role of murderer with naive enthusiasm." And then, for a fillip, there was a strange literary parallel . . .

THE VOICE OF DOREEN GRAY

by *WILLIAM BANKIER*

The episode was all over, the killing and the catching, before I realized I had been witness to an astonishing coincidence. Or maybe it was not a coincidence at all. Perhaps it was preordained at a christening more than half a century ago, probably without thought on the part of the parents. Or it may just be my way of looking at things, my poetic mind, that leads me to see a parallel between this story and a famous one in literature.

Who am I? My name is Jim McCrindle and I am the Detective Sergeant who was called in when somebody pushed Marcus Casablanca down the elevator shaft at Daisy Recording Studios.

Was he pushed or did he fall? A fair question, because if he fell there was no murder and I could go home to my beer and matzoh with butter and raspberry jam. (Hard to spread, matzoh—the big crisp wafers tend to snap in your hand.) But the unanimous opinion was that he was pushed.

For one thing, Marcus Casablanca was too despicable a person, too basically mean, too downright lip-curling, foul-tongued, promise-breaking, weight-throwing wicked ever to die by accident. All of us are born to die; Marcus was born to be killed.

I got this reading from everyone I interviewed along with a fair amount of joy at his sudden and permanent departure. I spoke

© *1977 by William Bankier.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

first to Max Acton, the owner of Daisy Studios. He took me to the scene of the crime.

"Crime," he said, "not accident. The elevator got stuck on the seventh floor this morning. We're still waiting for the repair crew. Fortunately, being on the third floor, we can expect clients to walk up and down, which they did."

It was an old-fashioned, see-through, cage-type elevator. I flexed the gate, not worrying about fingerprints—everybody's would be on it. "Wouldn't this gate be closed on the empty shaft?"

"Yes, and a sign was posted. Elevator Out of Order." Acton pointed to it. "There it is." He was a beefy man with a moist pink face and curly hair that suggested a layer of snail shells covering his head. When he talked, he gesticulated. It was safer to stand a couple of paces away from Max Acton, the way his arms swung up and down like railway signals. "Besides," he went on, "Marcus walked up here today, like everybody else—three long flights in this heat. No way he'd forget the elevator was out of commission."

The studio owner was right about the heat. It was one of those July afternoons when the roads were becoming tar pits, and the branches of the trees were hanging straight down, and even the birds were sweating. A great day for erasing one of society's mistakes.

We studied the layout together. To reach the stairway Casablanca had to walk along a narrow corridor past the elevator gate. The stairway leading up to the floor above faced the cage less than two yards away. Our hypothesis was that the assailant first propped open the gate, then hid a few steps up the stairway. When Casablanca walked by, a swift rush and a push sent the unsuspecting victim plunging through tl.e opening and down three floors to his death.

"So simple," I concluded, "that's the way it must have happened. The only question is, who did it?" I turned to the bouncy, aggressive Mr. Acton as he stood, hands on hips and chin up. "Was it you?" I asked bluntly.

"It could have been but it wasn't. Oh, I often wished him dead. This is a happy day for Daisy Studios."

"Any specific grievance against him?"

Acton laughed and threw a fake punch at the wall. "Pow! Have you got a week to listen? Okay, the most recent. Casablanca is the head of the broadcast department at B & R Advertising. Last week we recorded a series of radio commercials for one of his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

junior producers. Sent him away happy. Next day, telephone, *bring, bring,* Casablanca. 'What are you doing to me, Max? These radio mixes are terrible.' He's full of dead air, of course. They were top broadcast quality. All he's doing is putting down his junior, making waves, being Casablanketyblank. I argue, but what can I do? We get a lot of business from B & R, and Marcus could shut it off tomorrow. So we re-mix at my expense. The shame, the loss!"

"Then there's a motive." I watched him closely. "Did you have the opportunity?"

"Certainly. I roam all over these halls. Everybody does, it's a busy place. Nobody knows where anybody is." Acton was swinging like a rush-hour traffic cop. "If you want me to give you an alibi, I can't. And if anybody around here says he has one, he's lying."

But nobody said he had an alibi. As I interviewed the people on the premises when Casablanca was pushed out of this world, I realized I was dealing with a unique case. There wasn't a disclaimer in the house. They all announced their candidacy for the role of the murderer with naive enthusiasm.

I talked next with the receptionist, Doreen Gray. She was a neat little old woman in her late fifties. Acton told me she had been with him forever and was noted for her loyalty, her tact, and her cool. She was the only one who never got mad at Casablanca and the host of others who were always abusing the helpless staff who had to serve them. Her soft voice turned away his wrath time and again and Daisy Studios often used Miss Gray as a buffer when difficult diplomatic missions were afoot.

I found her exactly as advertised. "I won't take a lot of your time, Miss Gray. I'd just like to ask a few questions about this sad affair."

"Yes, wasn't it unfortunate? I heard him scream, you know." Her voice was that of a young girl, perfectly modulated, pitched at a soft contralto. It was astonishing to hear it issuing from one so obviously in the final decades of her life. There is no way a near-sexagenerian should sound like a nineteen-year-old.

"Can you tell me anything else?"

"Only that he walked through here in a big hurry to get to the shop. He was complaining, as he often does, this time about being kept late by 'that incompetent engineer.' He meant Casey Carpenter. Then he was gone."

"I see. Have you any idea who killed him?"

"It could have been anyone. He was the enemy of us all."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Even of you, Miss Gray?"

"Even of me."

I found Casey Carpenter in the control room facing a twelve-track console, a couple of square yards of switches, buttons, meters, and red and green lights. He was surrounded by cabinets fitted with large reels of audiotape. In the studio on the other side of the glass, a tall youth in denim overalls covering bare chest and arms was talking to four lads crouched over an exotic assortment of electric guitars. This young man wore huge plastic spectacles and his hair was a cloud of white spores which gave him the appearance of an end-of-season dandelion.

Carpenter himself was lean and mean, a canvas-skinned individual without a gram of fat on his bones. His eyes looked like Clint Eastwood's when he hears he isn't getting paid. I learned he was a former paratrooper and I was not surprised.

"Everybody's telling me that they wanted to kill Casablanca," I said. "What's your reason, Casey?"

"The best," he said. He leaned forward and extended his bullet head toward me, causing my heart to beat a little faster. He indicated an ear. "Feel that," he said.

I did. Even his ears where in shape.

"Flesh and blood?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Casablanca says it's tin. He tells me and then he tells it all over town. You any idea what it does to a sound engineer's reputation to have people in the trade saying he's got a tin ear?"

"Who killed him, Carpenter? You? Acton? Miss Gray? That magic-looking fellow in the studio?"

"Why not just log it as a team effort?"

"Because somebody has to pay."

I finished questioning Carpenter, establishing that like the others he had no alibi; he could easily have darted out of the control room for a minute to station himself on the hall stairway. He saw Casablanca leave the studio heading for the street, and the engineer was a master at judging time.

I left him and entered the studio during a break to talk to the musiker, a jingle producer named Holman Tansey. He dismissed his talented goblins and they shambled away in their funny clothes, the misfits who put most of the background music in our lives.

"No, they're clean," Tansey answered my first question. "They

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

arrived for the session after the big fall. But I was here early. You'll have to consider me."

I considered him. "Could you have done it?"

"Sure could. I've been in and out of the studio to the men's room all afternoon. It's like I took a dose of Rachmaninoff's Prelude last night."

The men's room was just inside the stairwell. "Are you confessing?"

"No, but it's a great song," Tansey said. "All I'm saying is I had a chance to do it."

"What about motive? Do you have a motive?"

"Like Gershwin had rhythm. Lemme tell you. Marcus Casablanca needs a lot of commercial music for his clients. He has this system where he calls in, say, three producers to do an audition demo for a given job."

"Demo?"

"A simplified performance on tape. Just piano and voice—shows roughly what the finished job will sound like. He plays these demos for his client, makes a little show of it in the boardroom, then recommends one for completion."

"And?"

"I have been invited to submit eleven demos. And never been chosen once. It's a little game he had going—I could tell from the twinkle in those photoelectric cells he had for eyes. But I had to keep submitting. Hell, what a word for it, submitting." Tansey's face brightened. "Now Casablankenstein is gone, no more monster to deal with. I'll get a fair shake."

"I like your motive best of all."

"Pin it on me then, maestro. I'll be a hero all over town."

Before I went back to Acton's office, I asked Tansey if he'd heard anything that might be helpful.

"A couple of things, when I was in the men's room," he said. "One was Casablanca's scream."

"What did he scream?"

"I think it was E flat, modulating to a C."

I closed my eyes and said, "And the other thing?"

"A sound like seagulls screeching when there's not enough food to go round. Definitely not human. I asked Carpenter later if he was auditioning any sound effects. He said no."

I left the studio at last and Max Acton came with me. "Bushed, stroked out," he said. "Through for the day."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I'd missed lunch, so I went into a diner for pie and coffee. Acton sat beside me and drank a limeade. "Nice for you just to be able to walk away," I said. "Who's in charge when you aren't there?"

"Doreen," he said. "She insists on locking up anyway, even when I'm around. Told me once it gives her a nice feeling to be in the studio alone after everybody's gone. Sort of a sense of ownership—she has nothing else, no family, lives alone."

My face must have shown the frustration I was beginning to feel because Acton said, "I don't envy you this puzzle, Sergeant. We were a lethal bunch in there, every one of us on a short fuse whenever Casablanca was around. The only way I can help you is by weeding out one suspect. Doreen. She's as peaceful as the rest of us are rough. Well, you've heard her talk."

Maybe it was Acton's testimonial that made me decide to follow Doreen Gray. Maybe it was a hunch based on the feeling that she was too good to be true. Anyway, I stationed myself outside the building and watched people leave. Tansey and his musicians came out in a bunch carrying oddly shaped instrument cases. Sometime afterward, Casey Carpenter drifted out and down the street. Then, much later, Doreen Gray emerged—a little old lady passing by, making the street less threatening by her presence, her pale blue hair tied in a scarf. Her steps were delicate, purposeful, and she carried a large round tin clutched under one arm.

Surprisingly, she lived not far from the studios, in the downtown area, in a second-floor walkup. I gave her a few minutes to get settled, then approached her door. In the distance, slightly muffled, I heard the sound of seagulls screeching over a shortage of food. I knocked and the sound ended.

Doreen Gray opened the door. She invited me in, offered me tea, brought cups for both of us, and sat down, ready to help me with my investigation. As we talked, I looked around the room, a typical single-lady's bed-sitter, comfortable but not fancy. A notable feature was some sort of rectangular cabinet in the corner. It was covered with a charming needlepoint throw, but below the fringe I could see the gray metallic base of whatever it was. It looked very industrial for an old lady's room.

On a chair, half concealed by a cushion, lay the round metal tin, open now and empty.

"That's a beautiful piece of work," I said, indicating the needlepoint. "Did you do it?"

"Yes. I used to turn out yards of the stuff." The sweet modesty

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of her voice. It was restful just to listen without really hearing the words. I forced myself to stay on the track.

"And what's that under it? If you'll pardon my curiosity."

Only a fraction of a second's hesitation. "It's a tape playback machine." Miss Gray got up and removed the cloth to reveal a waist-high metal cabinet with two large reels on the flat upper surface. "A professional model, but a little out of date. Mr. Acton sold it to me for practically nothing when the studio was re-equipped. I don't record on it. I just use it for listening."

"What sort of things do you play?"

"Oh, classical music. Only classical. Naturally I have to play it softly in here because of the neighbors."

"Would you let me hear something now?"

"I'm sorry. I'd love to but I have such a headache after all the fuss at the studio today."

This was reasonably and gently said. I believed her, and yet I came back the next day when I knew she would not be there and I did a shameful thing. I used my special keys to let myself into her room. I knew what I had to do. Switching on the machine, I threaded up the large reel of audiotape, experimented with the stop and start buttons, and finally got the volume right.

And there it was—the case solved, the astonishing revelation reverberating around me like shrapnel over a foxhole.

The voice from the tape was harsh and bitter, cruel and vicious. The language was crude and beastly when it wasn't incoherent—the screeching of a hungry gull.

"I'll kill the rotten. stinking, scummy pigs! I'll cut their filthy heads off and stuff them down the drain . . ."

I ran the tape ahead through solid patches of obscenity and listened to the most recent recording. "He deserved to die, the miserable hyena. I'm glad I pushed him down the elevator shaft, I'd do it again, I'd like to bring the elevator down and crush his ugly insulting face. I'd like . . ."

I faded the hysteria and finally switched it off, feeling shaken now in the silence after being exposed to such articulated evil. Her calm voice from the doorway brought me round.

"I expected you to do this, Sergeant McCrindle, and I'm glad. All these years. I'm glad it's over."

She looked so gentle and sounded so civilized, I had to ask the question. "That is *you* on the tape, Miss Gray?"

"Yes. For years I've faced the villains every day, the boors, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rude peasants, the nasty ones, the sadistic overlords." She was saying this in soft melodic tones. "I could never give them back face to face what they gave me. I was brought up to be polite. My parents taught me never to raise my voice. So I began staying late and letting off steam, saying what I felt like saying in the protection of the soundproof studio. Then I tried recording it, so I could play it to myself at home, for satisfaction, for relief. I did it to save my sanity." She gave me a questioning smile on the verge of tears. "But I'm afraid it didn't work."

So there it was, the astonishing coincidence I mentioned at the beginning. When the Grays christened their daughter Doreen more than half a century ago, they could not have foreseen what life would do to her and what she would do in her own defense. For years she had addressed the world in the mild fresh voice of a happy young woman, a voice for everyone to admire. Meanwhile, a record was being kept of the angry, ugly other side of her, the side she did not want others to hear.

And I was reminded of Dorian Gray, the fictional anti-hero of Oscar Wilde's story, the man who remained young and handsome throughout years of debauchery while his portrait, concealed in a locked room, gradually became the hideously appropriate reflection of his brutish existence.

Yes, the sad analogy was there. I would be sending to court a gentle lady, guilty of the crime of premeditated murder. And to convict her I would supply as evidence not the picture, but the voice of Doreen Gray.

"Q"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by
FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

Critically speaking, Florence V. Mayberry has been neglected. The younger critics of the genre have not discovered her special qualities. She has a deep awareness of people, especially of women, young and old. She packs her stories with emotion—emotion you accept, believe in. Because she can probe the depths of loneliness and despair, she knows the strange, the horrifying affinity between love and crime . . . Here is one of Florence V. Mayberry's finest stories . . .

THE GRASS WIDOW

by *FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY*

I used to watch Jim Gibbs walk past our house on his way to visit Mrs. Tichenor. Back then I didn't call him Jim. I was only 14 and he was around 30—31 to be exact—and I was trained to say Uncle or Aunt to old people if they were close friends and Mr. or Mrs. or Miss if they weren't. So Jim was Mr. Gibbs to me.

He went by every day to visit Mrs. Tichenor. Shameful, folks in town said, all except his relatives and maybe they did too on the quiet. Mrs. Tichenor was a grass widow, which is what they called a divorced woman in those days. Or so she said, but she might not be divorced at all, according to the gossip I heard—did anyone ever see her divorce papers? Dying too. Her lungs were bad and Doc Williams told his wife, who told everyone, that Mrs. Tichenor was likely on her deathbed.

With all that facing Jim Gibbs, it was a shame that a well-off man like Jim, who belonged to one of the best families in West Texas, would take up with her. Besides, he scarcely knew her. He met her at a church sociable before she got so housebound, and fell head over heels in love with her then and there.

Actually—and that was odd in a town of less than 2,000 people—I had never seen Mrs. Tichenor. She had been in town not

© *1977 by Florence V. Mayberry.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quite a year, had come from Pennsylvania to Texas to get well. She didn't go to the same church as our family, and I was in school most of the time. By the time I heard enough about her to be curious she was already too sick to leave her house, and before that she stayed home and did what fancy sewing anyone would give her to eke out the money she had brought with her. Which wasn't much.

I heard Papa tell Mama that, seeing he owned the bank, he always knew how much money everybody had. But with Jim Gibbs visiting her every day, carrying an armload of groceries—well, she didn't need much.

I heard, too, that she had a little girl. The child was young, so her minister's wife said, and stayed with relatives back in Pennsylvania. Back then, in a little Texas town like ours, folks didn't pay too much mind to germs, but the minister's wife said Mrs. Tichenor did. She knew she had consumption and wouldn't let the child be with her.

This was just before World War I and ideas about morals were different then. Divorced women weren't looked on kindly, sick or well. Folks figured they had feisty ways else they would have clung to their husbands till death did them part. My mother did with my father.

Jim always walked fast, or rode fast on Big Ben, on his way to Mrs. Tichenor's, and slow when he left. Once I was sitting under the lilac bush as he walked towards town in the twilight and I saw tears on his cheeks. It was the first time I had ever seen a man cry, and it was especially shocking for a man like Jim to do it. He was tall and strong, good-looking in a redheaded kind of way, a cowman who could ride range with the best of his hired hands, mend fence, brand, and with a hard business head on his shoulders besides, so my father said. My father should have known because he had a hard business head too—he owned half of the town and ran the other half.

When I watched Jim walk by crying, I thought: Mr. Gibbs is in love with that bad woman and she's been mean to him—they say sick people complain a lot. Seeing him that way gave me shivers, because at 14 I was getting ready for love. It was a terrible feeling, but beautiful at the same time. I began to wish someone would love me like that.

My mother felt sorry for Mrs. Tichenor—said she was too sick to do for herself and Jesus taught, let him without sin cast the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

first stone, and besides Jim Gibbs never visited her at night, only in the daytime when a neighbor might drop in on them any minute. For instance my mother did, carrying with her a slab of pie or a plate of chicken and dumplings or a fresh loaf of bread—different things, so the poor soul would have something decent to eat. But Mama would never let me go with her.

One afternoon my father came home early from the bank and found my mother gone. When she came back with her empty dish, he bullied her until she told him where she had been. He railed around and ordered her never to set foot again in that whore's house. "What's a whore, Mama, what's it mean?" I asked after my father had stormed back downtown.

"Katy, what were you listening for?" Mama asked sharply, her eyes pink.

"I was out in the porch swing. How could I help hearing with Papa yelling?"

"Don't be sassy, young lady, talking about your Papa that way!" Mama always stuck up for Papa no matter what he did or said, and he was a terror.

"What's a whore?" I asked Gladys, my best chum at school.

"Oo-o-ooh, Katy Prendergast, you're talking nasty, you said a bad word!" she screamed. She did it in the school yard and next thing I was in the principal's office and he was asking what I said, and I wouldn't tell him because he was a man. Neither would Gladys for the same reason, but she told me she was never going to speak to me again and would tell her mother who would tell my mother. But next day she threw her arms around my neck and cried and said she hoped to die, she'd never tell on me. Only she still wouldn't say what whore meant.

Jim Gibbs usually visited Mrs. Tichenor along about four in the afternoon, most times bringing groceries. Once I saw him carrying a sack that had *Sotheby's Yard Goods and Dresses* printed on it. Clothes for Mrs. Tichenor, must be. Was that what whore meant? A man buying clothes for a woman who wasn't his wife?

A few times Jim came with Dr. Williams, riding Big Ben alongside the doctor's buggy. One of those times, after the doctor came out of Mrs. Tichenor's house—she lived just up the road from us—I watched the pair of them standing at the gate a long time. Then Jim went back into the house, his head bent and his shoulders slumped as though he carried a heavy load.

Mama was always in our house or in the garden when I came

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

home from school. I was the youngest child by twelve years, my brother and sister already married and living in Amarillo and Dallas. My father had laid down the law, as he did about everything. He told Mama to always be home when I was out of school—and so must I, no lollygagging around with schoolmates, girls couldn't be trusted alone, no telling what they'd be up to.

So it was a shock one day when I came home and Mama wasn't there. She came back soon, though, running down the path from the direction of Mrs. Tichenor's house, pink in the face and out of breath with hurry.

"You've been up at Mrs. Tichenor's again, haven't you, Mama?"

"Hush!" she said, scared like, looking around as though my father might be home. "Mind your manners, Miss, don't you be questioning your Mama."

"You have been! And after Papa said you couldn't."

"So I have!" she said, as flip as I might have said it to anyone but Papa. "So I have. The poor thing, she can barely down a bowl of soup. Jim Gibbs does his best, but he don't know how to take care of a sick woman, shouldn't be doing it anyway. Now if you know what's good for you, you'll not tell your father a thing about it. It was only my Christian duty."

I had no intention of telling my father. But I saw my chance—to set eyes on Mrs. Tichenor. Perhaps if I could see her I would know what a whore is. "I won't tell, Mama, *if*—"

Mama looked startled. "*If* what, Miss Sassbox?"

"If you'll let me go with you tomorrow when you take something for her to eat. Mama, I bet you've been taking her things all along, probably every day. Please let me go with you, Mama. If Papa comes home before we do we can just say we've been—oh, anywhere, visiting, shopping. Mama, if she's dying like they say, it can't hurt just to see her."

Mama looked uncertain. "They say consumption is catching."

"Only if you eat out of their dishes without scalding them first, or they cough in your face. I read about it. Please!"

"I'll see."

"Tomorrow?"

"We'll see. Maybe you'll sass your teacher like you do me and be kept after school. Then it'll be too late for visiting."

I figured then she would let me go with her. I was never kept after school. I was a good scholar. Besides, my father was chairman of the school board.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I was so excited at school next day that I shivered off and on even though the late spring day was warm. "Are you sick, Katy?" the teacher asked. "If you don't feel well, perhaps you had better go on home now." If it had been afternoon when she asked that, I would have taken her up. But it was morning and there was still noon dinner to be eaten with Papa. "I feel fine. Just a little draft maybe." Which was silly, it was warm as all getout.

Mama had chicken and dumplings for noon dinner, green onions and radishes out of our garden, peas in cream sauce, lemon pie with high brown-tipped meringue. The dinner put Papa in a good mood, he didn't growl at us once. "Good gal," he said to Mama, and she blushed. Maybe from being pleased, maybe from a guilty conscience, maybe from both.

That afternoon at school I put on a little for the teacher—I shivered every time she looked my way. "Katy, you are shivering! You certain you feel all right?"

"Well—maybe I *should* go home."

I walked slow across the school yard in case the teacher was watching, then ran the rest of the way home. Leaving early was better—no schoolmates to see Mama and me go into Mrs. Tichenor's house. "I got let out early, was all through with my class work," I fibbed to Mama. "Let's go now before there's a chance of Papa coming home."

"I declare," Mama said uncertainly. "Truth is, I'd been meaning to go up early to keep you from coming along. But now you're here, I suppose—" She turned back into the kitchen and picked up a little basket with a white fringed napkin across it. "Poor thing, she don't eat enough to keep a bird alive, but chicken and dumplings may tempt her."

It was queer the way I felt as Mama and I walked to Mrs. Tichenor's house. As though I were taking a long journey into some foreign country. Scared and excited. Jim's horse, Big Ben, was tied to the hitching post in front of her house, tossing his head against flies that lit on his neck. Big Ben's coat was red as fire, like Jim Gibbs's hair, and he was a real beauty. Fire in Big Ben too—finest horse in all that cow country, folks said. So Mama and I knew Jim had come early too to visit Mrs. Tichenor.

"Mind your manners," Mama whispered as she knocked on the screen door. "And stop staring."

It was Jim who came to the door. "Howdy, Mrs. Prendergast, Miss Katy, come right in."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I brought a little something for Mrs. Tichenor," Mama said, holding out the basket but walking right inside at the same time. "How's she feeling today?"

"Well—" Jim hesitated like he didn't want to go on with that, and looked over his shoulder towards the back of the house. "Not too—"

And there she was. Just suddenly. Standing in the archway that led into the back parlor. The wide opening framed her almost like she was on a stage, with the sun from the sitting-room's west window floodlighting her face. My tongue turned dry, and I realized my mouth was hanging open. I shut it and swallowed. Mrs. Tichenor was as beautiful as an angel.

All my life long, either before or after, I never saw another woman as beautiful as Mrs. Tichenor. No wonder Jim fell in love with her at first sight. And stayed in love.

She was wearing a loose white robe, its sleeves wide and full like wings, which helped the angel look. Her hair hung down her back in soft black waves, and her eyes were just as black. Creamy pale skin, except for a pink flush on her cheeks. Slender and almost as tall as Jim. She was so beautiful she made me hurt.

"You're so kind to me, Mrs. Prendergast, I do thank you." Her voice was beautiful too, soft and breathy with a city sound to it. "And is this young lady your daughter whom I've never met before?"

"Yes, my youngest. Katy—Katy, meet Mrs. Tichenor."

"Pleased to meet you, Ma'am," I whispered.

"Won't you sit down and visit a while?" When Mrs. Tichenor smiled, her eyes glowed like there were soft-shaded lamps behind them.

"Thank you, but we have to get right back home," Mama said nervously. "Got some garden stuff to fix for supper. Shall I just put this chicken and dumplings in the kitchen? Brought gravy to go with it—tastes pretty good heated up."

"I'll take them, Ma'am," Jim said, smiling. You could tell he liked Mama.

"Oh, well, I could—" She handed the basket to Jim. "No hurry about getting the basket and dishes back. I can pick them up tomorrow."

"I'll carry them back," Jim said.

Mama looked flustered, like a pin was stuck in her and she didn't want to let on. "Oh, no, please don't bother. I'll take them

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

now, save you the trip. I'll just put the chicken and gravy in something here—"

"Yes, that would be better," Mrs. Tichenor said, still smiling, but the lamps had turned out behind her eyes. Anybody but a fool could tell that Mama didn't want somebody at our house to know she had come here. "You shouldn't trouble so much for me, but I'm truly grateful. I haven't felt like eating but now I do—everything you cook is so delicious. What a pretty daughter you have—you must be very proud of her."

"Pretty is as pretty does," Mama said prissily. Then flushed. Because there was never anyone so pretty as Mrs. Tichenor. "Come along, Katy, I've things laid out for you to do."

I wanted to go close to Mrs. Tichenor, to shake her hand, tell her I thought she was beautiful, and I was sure she just had to be good. But nobody I ever knew did anything like that, make such a show of themselves. So I just bobbed my head and mumbled, "Pleased to meet you, Ma'am." I didn't realize until I was on the front porch that I had backed out of the room.

Mama whirled on me and whispered, "Don't look so dauncey, girl. You look like that and Papa will know for sure we've been up to something."

Once we were outside the yard I said, "Oh, Mama, she's so beautiful, she's got to be good inside. You think she's good too—that's why you take things to her every day."

"Hush! Not every day."

"And God shouldn't let her die!" To my horror I began to fight back tears.

"Katy Prendergast, stop that! I should never have taken you along. If your father hears about it—" Mama's voice trailed off and her face crinkled with worry as she looked at me. "Now don't fret about it. She may get better—folks do sometimes, even with consumption. Just put your mind on helping me get Papa's supper."

I wasn't much help though, because my mind was still up the street with Mrs. Tichenor. Mama fussed, saying I was dreaming over the radishes and onions, she might better have done everything herself. But when Papa came home for supper he was in a good mood for once and pulled on my long heavy braid as he came into the dining room. I yanked away and said sharply, "Don't!"

He looked surprised, because if Papa pulled on your braid it was considered a compliment. "Humph!" he grunted. He walked

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on into the kitchen and I heard him ask, "What's the matter with that girl of yours, Mattie? Kind of sassed me."

"Sassed you! Oh, I don't think she meant anything, Mr. Prendergast. It's just her age, growing up, you know, that's all."

He didn't mention it again, but at the supper table he kept looking at me over his glasses, like he was expecting me to say, "Excuse me, Papa." I didn't say anything out loud. But inside I was saying, *I hate you, I hate you for being mean about Mrs. Tichenor.*

Suddenly I thought of the one person I knew who really loved Mrs. Tichenor, no matter what anyone said. Jim Gibbs.

Next afternoon I hurried home from school, looked up the street toward the Tichenor house, and didn't see Big Ben hitched outside or the doctor's buggy. So I made it my business to hang around in the front yard by the picket fence to see when Jim came. After a while I heard hooves plopping on the road. It was Big Ben, his shiny red neck arched, and Jim on his back with his big hat tilted to one side of his red hair. I tell you, they were a sight. Both handsome, red-haired, Big Ben proud-stepping, Jim sitting easy but proud too. Jim tipped his hat to me, just like I was grownup. I smiled and said, "How-de-do."

He tied Big Ben to the iron hitching post beside Mrs. Tichenor's front gate, then clicked his high-heeled boots up her walk, his steps light and quick as though he were in a hurry to get there. He didn't knock, just opened the screen door and went in as though it was his house. The door shut softly and I felt lonely, left out. I wanted to go see Mrs. Tichenor too.

Why couldn't I? Why couldn't I take something, like a present, and go too?

But what did I have that was all mine, that would really be a gift from me? Funny. My papa was one of the richest men in the county, and I had nothing of my own to give away except—Quickly, before I got too scared, I hurried onto our porch, softly opened the front screen, tiptoed upstairs to my room, and opened the red velvet box that held my lavaliere with the pearl in it. Mama's younger sister who lived out in California had sent it to me. We didn't see her once in a blue moon, so she wouldn't know if I gave it away. Besides, she didn't like Papa and Papa didn't like her. He didn't like the lavaliere either so I never wore it.

I took it, velvet box and all, tiptoed back downstairs, out the front door, and ran up the street, my heart pounding. Big Ben

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

snorted as I passed him and I jumped a foot. Then slowly, like a lady making a neighborly call, I went up the steps and knocked timidly on Mrs. Tichenor's front door.

The knock must have been too light. Anyway, no one answered. Voices came from beyond the back parlor in words I couldn't make out—spaces of silence, then words again. I turned to leave. But across the road there was Mrs. Dilson, our neighbor, walking up from town. If she saw me, she would be sure to ask Mama what I was doing there by myself—or worse, ask my father when she went to the bank. I opened the screen door and slipped inside.

A few steps across the rug and I reached the archway into the back parlor. No one was there, but the voices were plainer. Now I could make out what they were saying.

"Jim, it would be wicked." Mrs. Tichenor's voice was sad, not crying, but like an echo of crying done long ago. "The doctor won't say, but I know. I am dying, Jim. So don't talk about marriage. I don't intend to be a bride who may turn into a corpse in days or weeks. And I'll not let you be burdened with a child not your own."

"Melissa, hush! I'll help you get well. If we're married I can be with you day and night, looking after you. And your child would be my child. Besides, the old biddies would stop clucking their stories and making you miserable."

"No! If I die, I don't want it on my soul—"

"Good God, what about my soul! Think how I'd blame myself if I didn't do everything I could for you! Melissa, Melissa, I want you for my wife, no matter what."

I walked backwards, very softly, towards the porch. Stopped, because the voices were quiet and I was afraid the floor might creak.

"Please! You said you love me. Prove it," Jim implored.

"But I am proving it!" Her voice was high and desperate. "I am—"

Something smothered her voice, and there was another silence before she spoke again uncertainly, "Oh, Jim, I don't know—"

"I know. Please!"

"It isn't right, not fair."

"I'm going now. To the courthouse to get the license, the papers, whatever you need to sign. I'll bring the preacher here and we'll be married tonight."

"It's wrong, it isn't the way to start a marriage."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It is! Because it's the way we'll start ours. Melissa, I'm going for the papers now. Before you change your mind."

"But I didn't—"

I heard his feet move across the floor of the unseen room and I looked aorund frantically for a hiding place. A settee sat crosswise in a corner of the sitting room. I scooted under it, deep into the corner, and doubled up. With my face pressed into the rug I watched his boots stride across the room, heard the screen door creak open, then slap against the wooden frame of the doorway.

For what seemed forever I kept my breathing shallow, listening, and heard no movement, no sound. I crawled from beneath the settee and moved stealthily to the door. As I touched the screen, my neck prickled a warning and I whirled around. Mrs. Tichenor stood in the wide opening between the two parlors, her large black eyes startled, a hand at her breast. "Oh!" she said, her voice soft and raspy, like a chapped hand rubbing on silk. "I didn't hear you come in."

"No, ma'am," I said. "I knocked but no one heard."

"Didn't—didn't Mr. Gibbs see you?"

"No, ma'am. I—well, I—I brought something for you. This." And I held out the red velvet box.

She took the box, looking at me uncertainly. Then she opened it and saw the lavaliere. "Oh, how lovely! It's so pretty and delicate. Katy—that is your name, isn't it?—Katy, it's so lovely that I mustn't take it from you. It looks like you, it belongs with you. You must keep it, Katy."

"Please—it's all I have to give you. I wanted to give you something because—" I choked, unable to tell her why.

"I'm so grateful," she whispered. "Truly. But when you wear it, it will be special for me. As though it belongs to both of us." She handed it back to me. "Now it does belong to both of us, because I've made it a present back to you."

As I took it she smiled so sweetly, looked so beautiful, I had to tell her the truth. Like, you wouldn't tell lies to an angel, would you? "I was really hiding under your settee. Because nobody answered the door when I knocked, I came in and—and heard what you and Mr. Gibbs said." The rest came out in an impassioned plea. "Oh, please marry Mr. Gibbs. He can take care of you!"

She took my hand, squeezed it gently. "Then if you heard, you know why I'm afraid to. A wife should help her man, not be a burden to him."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But he takes care of you now. Wouldn't it be the same burden? Only you'd be married."

She looked into my eyes for what seemed a long time. Then she walked slowly to the settee and sat down. Her hands were trembling and she locked them together on her lap. "Trust a child to get at the truth," she said. "You're right. It is a burden now."

"But he *likes* taking care of you. Even better than riding Big Ben."

She stood up, moved unsteadily towards the back parlor. As she passed me she said, "Thank you, Katy. For everything." And went on, out of sight, into a room that I discovered later was her bedroom. I left too, running tiptoe down the path, up onto our veranda.

Mama was in our kitchen, starting supper. "Set the table, Katy. It's lodge night for Papa—he'll be home soon."

Fried chicken, mashed potatoes, cream gravy, cole slaw, apple pie. Hot biscuits, of course, Papa wouldn't touch a meal that didn't have hot bread. Mostly Papa grunted at mealtimes and put his eyebrows together if anybody talked, but Mama's good food must have had a mellowing effect, or else the news was too much for him to hold back.

"What do you think Jim Gibbs did this afternoon, Mattie?" he asked, not expecting any answer. Papa never needed anyone's answer, least of all his family's.

"Why, I've no idea, Mr. Prendergast," Mama said, looking guilty at the mention of Jim Gibbs whom she saw more times than Papa knew about.

"Blame fool went for a wedding license at the courthouse. For him and that—woman up the road. Said she was too sick to come with him, he'd take any paper needed back to her and return it after she signed it. Girl in the office started to give it to him but Joe Miller"—Mr. Miller was the County Clerk—"came in just then, so Jim told him what he wanted. Well, Joe's known Jim since he was born and naturally like a good friend of the Gibbses, he warned Jim to take second thought—could be the woman wasn't actually divorced, could get himself in a pack of trouble with bigamy. But Jim's got a temper like his hair. Hauled off, slammed Joe against the wall right in the county office."

Mama's eyes were big as saucers. "Hurt Joe?"

"Lump on the back of his head. Jim banged him good, then tore off like a wild stallion. So Joe called me and asked if anything

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ought to be done about it, because Jim needed to be saved from himself, getting mixed up with another man's leavings. I told Joe as Mayor of this town I'd have none of that carrying on. Went over, gathered up Joe, and we swore out a warrant with the sheriff on Jim. Had it served right off. Like I told you, Mattie, when you wanted to traipse up there carrying victuals to that trashy woman. Fool around trash, you end up trash." He fixed his bleak harsh gaze on me. "Hear that, young lady? Keep that in mind."

Except abstractly, simply because he was my father, I never really liked my father. That night I hated him. Mama's food knotted in my stomach and before I could do anything about it, there it was. All back in my plate with my father leaping from his chair, eyes blazing in a dead-white face.

My timid, self-effacing mother sprang up and set herself squarely between me and him. "Shame on you, Mr. Prendergast! Frightening the child, saying such things. Now leave this instant before you make her worse!"

Papa's mouth dropped open and his eyes took on the surprised, hurt look of a spoiled child who for the first time has been refused something. Without another word he stalked out of the room and out of the house, just as I was sick again.

As Mama tucked me in bed, I asked, "Will they put Mr. Gibbs in jail?" It was a terrible thought. Who would take care of Mrs. Tichenor if they did?

"I doubt that," she said. "Not with Jim Gibbs being who he is. Besides, likely he didn't hurt Joe Miller much. Now stop fretting over what your Papa said."

"Do you think they'll still get married? Even if—" I started to say, *even if Mrs. Tichenor said she wouldn't.*

"Hush!" Mama said, trying to look stern. "You're working yourself up for nothing. Jim's not going to jail and whether they get married or not is none of your business."

Silence dropped between us, singing in my ears in that soft lonely way like crickets singing in the grass when you're all alone except for them and yourself. Finally I broke it. "Do you think—she'll really die? Maybe she wouldn't if she got married. If she was happy she'd want to keep living."

"Maybe. Now shut your eyes and go to sleep. I'll just run up the street a bit to see if I can do anything for the poor soul, take her a little something to eat."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She blew out the lamp and went downstairs. I could hear her moving around the kitchen. At last the front screen creaked shut and I jumped out of bed, ran to the window, and watched the pale moth look of Mama's light dress move up the path until the night swallowed it. I dressed fast, hurried down the dark stairway, out of the house, and up to Mrs. Tichenor's.

I avoided the front porch for fear I might meet Mama coming out, and slipped around the side of the house. All the blinds were up and I saw no one in the back parlor window, so I kept on around the house, past another corner, and came to an open lighted window. Through it I saw Mrs. Tichenor in a big brass bed, her face as white as the sheet drawn up to her neck. At the foot of the bed Mama and Jim Gibbs were looking at each other, Mama big-eyed and solemn, Jim's face hard.

"She says she won't sign the paper for the license," Jim was saying. "Not here, or anywhere. I've been begging her to let me bundle her up and take her to the next county. We'll get married there. But she won't! Not after that damn—"

"Jim! Please!" Mrs. Tichenor's voice was thin and raspy.

"After that damn Joe Miller hiked over to your husband—begging your pardon, Mrs. Prendergast, but Bill's a damn prig and he egged on Joe. So the pair of them got the sheriff to send his deputy right here—right in front of Melissa, serving the paper on me. Now Melissa says no wedding. Ever. Says she's brought nothing but trouble on me."

He faced Mrs. Tichenor. "God, honey, can't you see it's trouble for me if you *don't* marry me? I care about *you*, not Bill Prendergast and Joe Miller, they can burn in hell! Don't let 'em have the satisfaction of stopping our marriage."

He turned back to Mama. "I hate saying this, Mrs. Prendergast, because you're as fine a lady as I know. It's nothing to do with you except to show you what happened. But outside the house, as the deputy left here, he told me it was your husband who insisted on the warrant being served. Said he'd have no such marriage on his street. And Melissa standing at the door, hearing that!"

"Quiet down, Mr. Gibbs," Mama said softly but firmly. "We're upsetting Mrs. Tichenor. But if this will be any help to you, I want you both to know I'd consider it an honor to be your witness if this lady does decide to marry you."

Jim touched Mama's hand, just for a moment, then walked around the bed, sat on its edge, and gently held the sheet-covered

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shoulders. "Hear that, Melissa? Please, Melissa."

Her head moved slowly from side to side on the pillow, her profiled features like those of a marble face. They were all so quiet that I feared they would hear my breathing, so I stepped deeper into the shadows. "I need to be alone," she said finally. "I need to think—things out. By myself."

He just sat there, as though he couldn't bear to move.

"I'll let you know soon, Jim. It's—I'm so tired."

"Tomorrow? Early?"

"Soon."

He leaned down and kissed her full on the mouth, right in front of Mama. Then he followed Mama into the next room. Mrs. Tichenor called, "Jim, will you close the door?" He turned back, went to the lamp, leaned over to blow it out. "No, leave the light on. I don't like the dark." She tried to laugh. "The boogeyman, you know."

Jim gave her a sickly smile, like the way I felt. All of a sudden I was thinking how dark being dead must be. He went over to the bed, kissed her again, and went out.

I tiptoed back around the house, figuring it was better to leave before Mama started home. I passed the back-parlor window, saw Mama and Jim sitting beside a marble-topped table, Mama looking sympathetic, Jim talking and rubbing his forehead as though to rid it of an ache. Since Mama wasn't leaving yet, I turned back to Mrs. Tichenor's window.

She had thrown the sheet aside and was sitting on the side of the bed, her hand on her chest like she had to hold it together. After a little, maybe a minute, maybe longer, she stood up and walked unsteadily to a tall chest of drawers with a mirror on its top. As she stared into the mirror I could see her full face, see her lips moving without sound. Her eyes closed, her head bowed, and her lips kept moving.

It made me ashamed to spy on her prayer, when it belonged just to her and God, so I moved away, swallowing tears. At the corner of the house I stopped, held my hand over my mouth to muffle a sob, then moved on again, past the back-parlor window, and turned toward the front of the house.

I knew what it was immediately. Guns aren't strange in Texas. It was a shot coming from the other side of the house.

I whirled back, oblivious of the noise I made, and reached the bedroom window as Jim, then Mama, ran through the bedroom

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

door. Jim bent to the floor, took the whiteclad figure in his arms, his face as white as Mrs. Tichenor's gown. "Get Doc Williams! Quick!" he yelled at Mama.

But I was already on the way, screaming as I ran, "I'll fetch him, I'll fetch him!"

The screen door slammed behind me as someone came out on the porch, but I didn't turn to see who it was. I ran, ran, my legs weightless, seeming not a part of me. Once I fell as my toe stubbed on a tree root, but I felt no pain. All the time screaming. "Dr. Williams, Dr. Williams, Dr. Williams!"

He was already on his veranda when I reached his house and I gasped, "Mrs. Tichenor! She shot herself!"

He dashed inside, came out with his satchel, ran beside me, then ahead as I clutched a pain in my side and stopped to catch my breath.

But running did no good. Because Mrs. Tichenor was dead. Someone—the house seemed filled with people—told me so as I came in. When I reached the bedroom, Jim was sitting on the side of the bed, holding her in his arms, rocking her back and forth as though she was a child he had to comfort.

Suddenly my father was in the bedroom too. News travels fast in a town like ours. A lot of people, not just neighbors, were in the room too, seeming sucked there as though disaster had created a vacuum. My father's face was yellow-white, his eyes fierce, his thin lips drawn against his teeth. He said, "Mattie, get yourself and that girl out of this house!"

Jim turned, stared at my father. Then in a swift muscular movement he lifted the frail dead body and carried it to my father. Jim's face looked as dead as Mrs. Tichenor's—not angry, just dead.

"Take a good look, Bill," he said. "Fill your eyes. So you'll remember forever how she looked the night you murdered her. I'd like to send you on your way tonight too. But that would be sacrilege, going along with her. I hope you live a long, long time. So you'll have plenty of time to remember you killed my girl. And I swear, Bill, I'm going to stick close so every time you see me you'll remember you're a murderer."

He turned back to the bed, put the limp body on it, then sat, not moving, looking at her.

My father grabbed Mama's shoulder, shoved her through the door, and jerked his head at me to follow.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The three of us walked silently through the house, out to the porch, down the path, Papa and Mama ahead, me following.

I lifted my hand, held it stiffly with finger pointed, as Mrs. Tichenor must have held her revolver. But not aimed at me. At my father. Pulled an imaginary trigger, gloated as an unseen bullet pierced his head and splayed through those fierce eyes. I imagined him falling to the ground, lying in a dreadful dark pool. And I strode forward, stamping across a body that had no substance, whispering softly, "Murderer! Murderer!"

Now Jim's dead too. I buried him last week after 40 years of marriage. I suppose that's why all this comes back to mind. Jim was a good husband. Kind. Treated me fine, me and our children. But I never remember him saying he loved me.

But I remember right enough the promise he made to Papa. Everybody said how nice it was I got me a man who was so fond of my parents. Especially of my father. Jim dropping in every day at the bank, spending every Sunday with Papa on the front porch while I visited with Mama inside, or helping him garden. Even joined the same lodge. Then, after my father had his stroke, sitting hour after hour with him in the bedroom. Folks never seemed to notice that Jim never talked with Papa, just looked at him, with a kind of twisted half smile on his face.

Once I almost told Jim. About how I shot my father the night Mrs. Tichenor died. But I figured it wouldn't have changed him. Towards me, I mean. I never held any grudge about it though. I loved her too. Besides, in a way she gave Jim to me.

The September 1977 issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale August 2.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

JACK RITCHIE

A new wrinkle in kidnaping—the world's entire supply of Red Intrepid tomato seeds. You say you don't believe it? Well, I'll tell you what we'll do . . .

Jack Ritchie's brand of humor is all his own—he really should patent it. By George, we think he could at that! It's so sui generis *that he doesn't have to put his name on his stories . . .*

THE SEED CAPER

by JACK RITCHIE

I studied the item I'd clipped from the newspaper last week. "Regan, we are going to kidnap five hundred pounds of tomato seeds."

He looked at me. "Tomato seeds?"

I nodded. "Regan, ours is a precarious profession, is it not? We have had our hairy moments, haven't we? Remember the A & C Supermarket? Here we dash out of the store with thirty-five hundred dollars only to find that we can't get our damn car started."

The memory of it pained Regan too. "The worst lemon I ever stole. Lucky for us that truck happened to pull up next to us."

"Yes. Nevertheless, fleeing in a Grandma's Homemade Doughnuts truck still rankles as one of the more embarrassing moments of my life. And there have been other incidents, have there not? The point I'm making, Regan, is that eventually our luck will run out if we continue our present line of operations."

Regan agreed. "But still what else is there? Supermarkets are just about the best thing going for us these days."

"Listen," I said, and began reading the clipping. " 'The J. C. Swenson Seed Company announces that its experimental farm

© *1977 by Jack Ritchie.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

has produced a new hybrid tomato, the Red Intrepid, which it claims is completely superior to anything yet developed in the field. It is a medium-sized fleshy fruit, smooth and of bright red color, with a unique sweet flavor. It is not subject to cracking and uneven ripening at the shoulders, and is completely resistant to fusarium wilt.

" 'Mr. Swenson, president of the company, reveals that the Red Intrepid is the result of ten years of experimentation. Only five hundred pounds of Red Intrepid seeds will be available for sale this year. The Red Intrepid will be listed in the J. C. Swenson spring catalogue. The seeds are expected to sell for seventy-five cents per packet, or $5.00 per one-half ounce.' "

Regan was impressed. "That's a lot of money for half an ounce of tomato seeds."

"Exactly. And extending that, one ounce should sell for ten dollars, and one pound for one hundred and sixty dollars, and five hundred pounds for *eighty thousand dollars*. Of course, that figure is retail and does not allow for probable discounts for purchases of more than one-half of an ounce. Nevertheless, I do think that it would not be at all unreasonable if we demanded $10,000 for the return of the seeds—especially considering that they are the result of ten years of work and apparently, at the moment, the world's entire supply of the Red Intrepid."

Regan scratched his neck. "If the seeds are worth so much, why kidnap? Couldn't we just plain steal?"

"There would remain the problem of converting them to cash. We could not dispose of them in bulk—certainly all seed houses and commercial growers would be alerted—and I simply cannot picture myself sorting tiny seeds into thousands of packets and peddling them from door to door. No, we will kidnap the seeds."

"Wouldn't the seeds be pretty well-guarded?"

I smiled. "Regan, who in the world would be crazy enough to kidnap tomato seeds?"

We went to our car, and I drove Regan out to a hill overlooking highway 57 and its junction with county trunk C.

I parked on the shoulder of the road. "There it is, Regan. The J. C. Swenson Seed Company. Like most seed houses, it is located in a rural area."

Regan studied the layout. "There are about twenty cars parked in the lot."

I nodded. "The automobiles of the employees. However, they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

need not concern us. We will strike after closing hours. I've driven by here a number of times in the last few days and I've noticed that after five o'clock the only car down there is a battered sedan and I imagine that it belongs to the night watchman."

"How do you know they still got the seeds? Maybe they're sold out."

"Yesterday I dropped into the company's office to ask for their spring catalogue. I learned that the edition had not yet been mailed to prospective customers, but I was given a copy. And while I was there, I asked one of the office girls if I could buy a packet of Red Intrepid seeds and she informed me that the seeds were still in their bulk containers. They had not yet been packaged."

"All right," Regan said. "So the seeds are still there. Now how do we work the caper?"

"Late tonight we will enter the rear of the building. We will tie up the watchman and transfer the seeds to our car. After we get away, we will contact Mr. J. C. Swenson and make arrangements for the transfer of $10,000 from him to us. It is as simple as that."

It was nearly one o'clock the next morning when Regan and I drove back to the J. C. Swenson Seed Company. The battered sedan was the only car in the lot.

We parked and slipped on our masks. Regan got to work on the rear door of the warehouse and in a matter of minutes we were inside. We found ourselves among numerous stacks of bags, some of them reaching to the ceiling.

Regan whistled softly. "Are all of them tomato seeds?"

"I doubt it. Probably peas and beans and corn and so on."

The huge warehouse was dimly lit by single bulbs here and there. Regan and I proceeded cautiously down the aisles.

We came upon a young man seated at a battered desk, eating a sandwich and poring over one of several thick books before him.

Regan stepped forward with his drawn gun. "Take it easy and nobody gets hurt."

The night watchman put down his sandwich and raised his hands. "You're wasting your time. The company deposits all its cash at the bank daily. The safe is empty."

"I am not interested in the safe," I said. "Lead me to your tomato seeds."

He blinked. "Why?"

"Never mind why. Just show us."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He shrugged and led us back through the aisles to another section of the building. We entered a medium-sized room containing bins, boxes, and more stacked bags.

"There they are," he said. "Tomato seeds."

"Which are the Red Intrepids?"

"I don't know, but the bags have labels."

Regan and I found the Red Intrepids after a five-minute search. The seeds were in twenty-pound cloth bags.

"You don't mind me asking what you're doing?" the watchman asked.

"Not at all," I said. "As a matter of fact, I would like you to pass the information on to Mr. Swenson. We are kidnaping the Red Intrepid seeds and we demand $10,000 for their safe return."

The night watchman stared at us for some moments. "Suppose Mr. Swenson won't pay the ten thousand dollars?"

I put menace into my chuckle. "In that case we will charter an airplane and scatter Red Intrepid seeds to the four winds. Come autumn, there will be a bootleg harvesting of field-sown Red Intrepids from one corner of this state to the other."

We utilized the services of the watchman to carry the bags out to our car. When we were through, we took the watchman back to his desk. Regan produced a rope and began tying him to a chair.

"One other thing," I said. "Swenson is not to bring the police into this. If he does, we will immediately dispose of the seeds."

I picked up the open volume on the desk. It appeared to be a textbook. "Ah," I said. "A college student? Working your way through school? What is your major?"

"Botany," he said, "With emphasis on horticulture. How will Mr. Swenson get in touch with you?"

"We will phone him sometime during the day."

"Mr. Swenson is in the hospital," the night watchman said. "I don't know which one, but he got banged up in an auto accident. Both legs broken."

I thought that over. An obstacle, but a minor one. "What is your name?"

"Ingram. Joseph Ingram."

"Are you in the telephone book?"

"No. But I live with my parents. The William Ingrams. They have a phone."

"Good enough. We will use you as our intermediary. You find Swenson and talk to him and then we'll talk to you."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Regan and I drove back to our motel and got some sleep. In the morning we explored some country back roads until we found an abandoned barn, where we unloaded our bags of seeds in a dry corner.

In the afternoon I went to a public phone booth, looked up the Ingram number, and dialed. Young Ingram answered the call.

"Have you passed on our information to Swenson?" I asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Tomorrow morning I want you to put ten thousand dollars into a plain paper bag. You will drive the East-West freeway for approximately twenty miles and take the Amesville off-ramp. You will deposit the package in the tall grass at the first arterial stop sign you see."

"Yes, sir. And where will I find the seeds?"

"I'll phone you about that later. And remember, only one of us will pick up the money. The other will be watching from a safe distance. If anything, *anything,* goes wrong, he will immediately dispose of the seeds. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

The next morning, Regan and I flipped a coin and I lost.

I drove our car to the pickup point and found the package. As I drove back toward the city, I glanced frequently at my rear-view mirror, but as far as I could tell I wasn't being followed.

After a while I turned into a motel and rented a room. I phoned Ingram and told him where to find the seeds. Then I sat down and waited.

If the police had been watching me, they would be closing in soon. In the event they did, I would not, of course, betray Regan to them. And neither would he have betrayed me if he had lost the toss of the coin.

But the time passed and the police did not come.

At noon I drove to our motel and rejoined Regan.

We divided the money equally and Regan kissed his share. "I'm going out and pick up that sports coat I saw at the shopping center."

While he was gone, I packed our suitcases. The job seemed to have gone perfectly, but I always prefer to put distance between us and the site of the latest caper. I thought the West Coast would be fine this time of the year.

When I finished, I made a drink and switched on the TV set. I caught the middle of a news broadcast and soon I found a TV re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

porter interviewing J. C. Swenson. I recognized him from his picture on the catalogue. And he was standing. On two perfectly good legs.

I frowned.

"Yes," Swenson said, "The thieves—or kidnapers—definitely knew what they were doing."

I smiled.

"Did you recover the seeds?"

"Yes," Swenson said. "We found them in two places—an abandoned barn and under a tree in Kaminski ravine."

Under a tree? Kaminski ravine?

"How much was the ransom money?" the reporter asked.

"$100,000."

I sat up. $100,000?

Swenson continued. "They were extremely selective in the flower seeds they took. Our entire stock of North Ainu Vinca. Some seven pounds. That particular species is on the endangered list, you know. And all six pounds of our Bangladesh Gypsophilia. Extremely rare. It has the distinctive fragrance of mashed bananas. And all eighteen ounces of our Romanian Terre-verte Dictamnus. A collector's item. And three pounds of—"

The reporter interrupted him. "All together, how much was stolen?"

"Some ninety-two pounds of almost irreplaceable flower seeds." Swenson seemed puzzled. "They also took five hundred pounds of Red Intrepid tomato seeds. I just can't figure that out. So bulky, I mean. Proportionately not nearly as vabluable as its same weight in flower seeds."

I realized that my mouth was open and closed it.

Swenson answered another of the reporter's questions.

"Well, they just burst into the warehouse, locked my night watchman in a storeroom, and kidnaped the seeds."

Locked him in a room? Hell, no, we had tied him to—

I closed my eyes. I saw it all now. We had tied Ingram to the chair. He had, of course, managed to free himself after we left. Perhaps in a matter of minutes. Then that horticulture freak had loaded his car with those damn exotic seeds and taken them off to some safe hiding place. That done, he returned to the warehouse, locked himself in a storeroom, secreted the key, and waited until the firm's employees arrived for work in the morning.

I picked up the phone and dialed Ingram. He answered.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I had difficulty speaking. "I respect honor among thieves, but in this case I will make an exception. I am going to send an anonymous note to the police."

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," Ingram said. "I'll tell the police that you were my accomplice."

"Ha," I said, "You don't even know my identity."

"True," he said. "But I have your fingerprints. I would turn those over to the police."

I sneered. "I am very careful about where I leave my fingerprints. The only surface I remember touching is the rear doorknob and I wiped that clean before we left."

His voice sounded as though he were smiling. "Do you remember picking up my botany textbook? You left fingerprints on that loud and clear."

I hung up and doubled the bourbon in my second drink.

Regan came back, pleased with his new sports coat. "Yes, sir," he said happily, "That was the smoothest, neatest job we ever pulled."

I stared at him. Should I tell him?

Hell, no.

We got into our car and headed for the West Coast.

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Burke, J. F.	THE KAMA SUTRA TANGO	Harper & Row	$7.95	7/6
Knox, Bill	PILOT ERROR	Doubleday & Co., Inc.	6.95	7/1
Lovell, Marc	THE SECOND VANETTI AFFAIR	Doubleday & Co., Inc.	6.95	7/8
Wyllie, John	DEATH IS A DRUM . . . BEATING FOREVER	Doubleday & Co., Inc.	6.95	7/8

Titles and Data Supplied by the Publishers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

One morning last winter a young woman phoned and asked your Editor to grant her an interview for a county magazine. I declined as graciously as I could. She persisted. On her next phone call I asked my wife to decline for me. The young woman persisted. She suggested that my wife and I come to dinner—just a social invitation, she promised, there would be no further talk of an interview. We raised objections. Neither my wife nor I drives at night. She said her husband would be happy to pick us up and bring us back home. I told her I eat dinner earlier than most people. No problem—she would have dinner anytime I wished.

What possessed my wife and me to accept the invitation—to go to the home of two complete strangers—I don't know. While being driven to the strange house on dark deserted back roads, my wife and I—we confessed to each other later—began to have misgivings, a growing uneasiness. Had we been impulsive, rash, unwise? Or had it been an unavoidable working of fate?

In any event, your Editor came away from an excellent dinner and a charming evening with two short manuscripts of two unpublished writers—and perhaps the mystery was solved. The two manuscripts—one written by the persistent young wife, the other by her husband—were not, by the end of that charming evening, altogether unexpected. But the kind *of stories in the two manuscripts was totally unexpected. (Or was it?)*

Mrs. Reimold's "The Perfect Maid" is the 472nd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . The author was born in England in 1947 of British and Iraqi parents, and raised and educated in various parts of Europe and America. She studied theater and foreign languages at Middlebury College, and Italian literature at Columbia Graduate School and in Italy. She has taught reading, languages, acting, and singing, and has been senior editor and feature writer for "Westchester Illustrated" magazine . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE PERFECT MAID

by CHERYL REIMOLD

Monday, November 3

Today being Monday, I had soccer practise after school.

When we got to the field the clouds hung heavy above us, but the coach said we'd play anyway. With the Eastchester game coming up next week we couldn't afford to lose time. "They sure knocked the stuffin' outta you guys last month," the coach yelled. But that was on their field. We'd show 'em what a game was on our own turf. The coach blew his whistle and we kicked off.

I didn't even feel the first rain. I was really moving by then, flying down the field with the wind behind me. I remember I scored a goal right in the middle of a thunderclap.

The coach said we ought to knock off " 'counta the weather," but who wanted to quit? It was fine, running through the water and sliding over the slippery earth while the clouds bawled over our heads.

At 5:30 we had to stop. There was lightning and the sky had gone green and weird.

When I got home my teeth were chattering. The game must have kept me warm before, but by the time I reached our front door I was shivering from head to foot.

Mother was out, in New York probably, but Mona was there, of course.

"Why, Master Ben, you are a sight!" she greeted me. She always calls me "Master Ben." Must do it in England, where Mona comes from, to show who's who. "Get in, get in, you'll catch your death of cold."

She fussed around me like women do; only with Mona I didn't mind. She has gigantic eyes, like green globes flecked with fire, and sometimes she paints extra eyelashes underneath and on top to make them look even larger. She's got the body of a mermaid, and she wears tight sweaters when my mother's out. When she comes near you, it's like being in the wild gardens on Capri.

We never had a sexy maid before. It's changed things around, she tells me what to do and I do it. Which is crazy when you figure *she* works for *us*.

© *1977 by Cheryl Reimold.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You get straight out of those wet clothes while I draw your bath," said Mona. "Then I'll bring your supper to bed. There you go, sneezing already. Off with you, up to your room. Your bath'll be ready in a jiffy."

I lay in the bathtub thinking about Mona. She doesn't seem to have any friends, or at least I've never seen them, and she never talks on the phone or goes off with anyone on her free days. Still, she's only been with us for three months. Mother was thrilled to death to get her. She calls her the perfect maid.

Mona rapped on the bathroom door.

"You come out now, Master Ben. Be giving yourself pneumonia, you will."

"Okay, Mona. Be right out."

Mona had the bed ready for me with the electric blanket all warmed up. She rubbed my wet hair with a bath towel as I settled into bed.

"You boys, you think you're little gods," she muttered as she dried my hair. She was standing very close to me and her breasts smelled of flowers. "Don't think anything could ever happen to you. Just like my Johnny."

"What happened to Johnny?"

She blinked at me.

"He was only twelve," she said. "He came home from school with a chill, just like you. A week later—he died."

"A week later! How? Didn't they give him antibiotics or something?"

Mona looked away.

"I was out at work all day long, Master Ben. There wasn't a body to give him his medicine when he needed it. He promised to be good and take it at the proper times, but you lads, you never do what you're told. I came home one day and . . . and . . ." She put away the towel she was using to dry my hair. "I'll go and get your supper now. You're a lucky boy, Master Ben. You've got me to look after you."

Tuesday, November 4

I must have got too hot in the night because this morning I was lying uncovered on the bed, and with the window wide-open ("You've got to have fresh air, Master Ben") the room was like the Ice Queen's palace.

Mona scolded me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You boys, you're all alike. I've a good mind to tell your mother about this, Master Ben. She'll see there's no more soccer practise this term."

But I promised to keep under the blanket all day, and Mona relented. Mother came in to say I could stay home from school until I felt better. Dad had already left for the office.

I kept my promise to Mona, but I couldn't get warm. My hands and my face were burning, but I was cold inside.

"102," said Mona, shaking her head at me as she read the thermometer. "Just like Johnny, you are, going from a chill to goodness knows what. Went through his whole body, it did. Bit by bit, for seven days. I wish they'd of taken me instead of him."

"Who?" I asked her, pulling the blanket close under my chin.

A smile crept over her face which was usually so serious. A funny crooked smile.

"I always imagined a chariot—just like the one our queen has in England—with six white horses, taking little Johnny to heaven. He was just a mite, you know. Much smaller'n you. Much younger too. Nobody remembers him, 'cept me."

"What about his father?"

Mona looked at me for a moment. "My son never had a father," she said.

I didn't know what she meant, but suddenly I was tired of hearing about Johnny.

"I'm cold," I said. "Will you bring me a hot drink?"

"Of course, Master Ben," said Mona, going to the door. "And I'll get you some aspirins to bring that fever down. Don't worry. I'll take care of you."

Wednesday, November 5

The aspirins didn't do much. When I woke up this morning my whole body was aching. And I was so cold, though Mona pointed out that the electric blanket was set at HI.

"Don't you worry, Master Ben," she said, making me eat some sticky oatmeal she called Real English Porridge. "We'll get the doctor in today. He'll give you something to make you better."

Mother looked in to ask me if she should cancel her trip with Dad. Mona said she was sure she could manage; I just had a bad cold, that's all. Mother said something about Dr. Werner and planted an absent kiss on my head. She smelled of Saks Fifth Avenue, not the garden on Capri.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dr. Werner came later and scribbled prescriptions on different pieces of paper.

When he left it was dark outside. Mona stood looking out of the window.

"It's Guy Fawkes Day in England," she said.

"Who's Guy Fawkes?"

"He tried to blow up the Houses of Parliament but they caught him. Now every year on November the fifth they celebrate Guy Fawkes Day all over England."

I had a fit of coughing, and she brought me a glass of water.

"Tell me about Guy Fawkes Day," I said, moving over, and she sat down on the bed beside me. She was so close I could see the threads of her sweater ripple as she breathed.

"They have a big bonfire," she said. "And everyone roasts chestnuts or potatoes in it. At night the children set off fireworks all round the bonfire, and on top of it is the body of Guy."

"What?"

"Not his real body, Master Ben. A rag doll." She sounded scornful. "Although mind you, if they had 'is body, they'd sure as anything throw it on the fire, dead or alive. They think of the rag doll as Guy Fawkes himself."

"And they want to burn him to death?"

" 'Course they do. He was a bad man. Now he stands for all the people you'd like to see die, 'cept you can't do it, so you burn him instead. The rag doll, I mean," she said. "Oh, it's a magic night, with all the sparklers and golden rods and Catherine wheels. And then the rhyme everyone chanted round the fire. It was Johnny's favorite night of the year."

"Tell me the rhyme, Mona." It was the first time I'd told her to do something instead of the other way round.

She spoke the words slowly:

" 'Remember, remember
The fifth of November,
The Gunpowder treason and plot;
There is no reason
Why the Gunpowder treason
Should ever be forgot!' "

"That's a funny rhyme," I said. "I'm burning up myself, Mona. Will you get me a cold compress and put it on my forehead."

"Yes, Master Ben."

She rose obediently to find one. My throat ached and my head

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was spinning like a ball of fire—like one of Mona's Catherine wheels.

Thursday, November 6

I don't know what kind of pills Dr. Werner gave me, but they haven't helped. Mona stands there, glass in one hand, pills in the other. She seems to be giving me one pill or another every two hours.

I asked Mona if I was as sick as Johnny.

"Don't be silly, Master Ben," she answered sharply. "If you were that sick don't you think your parents would be here with you? And the doctor?"

"But we haven't told my parents or the doctor," I protested.

"Now you stop that. You're going to *think* yourself sick, you are. You've caught a bad cold, but you'll soon be as right as rain. So long as you take your medicine."

"Mona," I said, "come here and tell me about Guy Fawkes again."

When my parents called that night I told them I was much better and not to worry.

But Mona said if my temperature didn't go down she'd call the doctor again the next day.

"For safety's sake," she said. "You're looking better already, Master Ben."

I grinned at her. I really was her Master Ben now.

Friday, November 7

I felt very woozy and stiff this morning. My arms and legs didn't want to move at all.

"It's just from lying in bed so long," said Mona, squinting at my thermometer. "There, you see? Your temperature's down, nearly normal. Why don't you get up and walk around for a bit, Master Ben? That'll make you feel better."

I tried to, but my legs and my back ached so much I had to get back in bed again.

"Mona," I called to her. "My legs don't feel any better. And my back aches. First my throat, then my stomach; now my legs and back. Isn't this what happened to Johnny, Mona?"

I could see her eyes flash under all the blue color she wore over them.

"You stop talking about Johnny, Master Ben." She spoke softly,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but there was a shimmer in her voice. Like a knife under her words. "Johnny was ill and he died because there was no one to take care of him. He was thinner and weaker and younger than you. And poorer!" She laughed suddenly. "You're not so thin and weak, Master Ben. And you've got someone taking care of you. Day and night."

There was something strange in the way she talked. I tried to pull her over to me but my arm felt like lead.

"Tell me about Guy Fawkes," I said.

She looked down at me for some time.

"All right, Master Ben. After you take your medicine."

Saturday, November 8

I didn't wake up till afternoon. When I opened my eyes everything was floating in the room. Mona came in but I couldn't make her stay still. She was flying over me and then back to the door. I closed my eyes and opened them again and then I saw the animals, all gray and furry, popping off the wall, one after the other.

"Mona." I wanted to yell, but only a croak came out. "Mona, what are those animals doing here? Get them out, get them off the walls."

"What animals, Master Ben?" Her voice was far away and muffled by a constant ringing sound.

"Get them off the walls, Mona! I can't stand them, take them away."

"There are no animals, Master Ben."

I couldn't even see her. She was going blurry too, like the animals, merging with the animals. She was flying across the room again and then coming out of the wall with them, but she was coming straight at me.

"Get my mother!" I tried to yell. "Call my parents and tell them to come home. Call Dr. Werner, quick!"

"Your medicine, Master Ben."

"No! I don't want any medicine. Take it away."

"You take your medicine, Master Ben. Just remember Johnny, who had no one to give him his, no one to give him anything. You've been given everything, Master Ben, but you're not well today, not well at all. Come on now, open your mouth, don't struggle. There. It's a good thing you've got me looking after you. I'll see you get your medicine."

She faded back into the wall and the room went dark.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sunday, November 9

Church bells outside clanging—clang, clang, clang, they don't stop. Mona over me, huge eyes watching, eyes like round green coiled shining snakes. No medicine. I won't take the medicine. It's not medicine, I know that now.

"You take your medicine, Master Ben! You take your medicine!"

High shrieking laughter.

No. No medicine. It's not medicine. Where are my parents? Where's the doctor?

Only Mona's face grinning, grinning at me as she sets down the empty glass by the empty bottle of pills. Closing the blinds, one, two, three. In the dark, only Mona's voice speaking now, chanting something, some crazy rhyme, as she pulls the sheet up over my head.

"Q"

Peter Reimold's "Things That Haven't Happened" is the 473rd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . The author was born in East Berlin in 1946. At the age of six he fled to West Berlin where he saw his first orange and was very impressed by it. He developed a "chronic fascination with language and the arts." After studying literature and philosophy in West Germany, he took up linguistics at Columbia University, and has taught and edited in that field. He likes to play the piano and compose.

Peter and Cheryl met in Neuchatel, Switzerland, thirteen years ago. Five years later, after commuting between Italy and Germany, they were married in Frankfurt, Germany, and they now live in Westchester County . . .

Mr. Reimold's story begins on the next page. . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THINGS THAT HAVEN'T HAPPENED

by PETER REIMOLD

Martin was rocking in his chair by the window overlooking Second Avenue. He was writing in his diary for the day. It was twenty minutes before midnight. Martin was tired. He yawned, and the flame of the candle on the window still flickered as he exhaled.

Today he hadn't got his mail from the mailbox downstairs. That was a routine entry. He hadn't got his mail for nine weeks now, just as he hadn't bought milk or gone to the office. He hadn't made or received any telephone calls. That was routine too; the telephone had been disconnected weeks ago.

Gracia, his white Angora cat, walked into the room. She opened her mouth without uttering a sound and crept under the bed. Martin yawned again and reread his diary entry.

His apartment building hadn't been on fire today. He hadn't awakened to the smell of burned clothes and flesh and the frightened barking of the dog next door, and he hadn't been looking on as people, frantic to escape the flames, had jumped to their deaths on the pavement eleven floors below.

Of course he hadn't taken the elevator today. He would never take it again. That was how it had started—when he discovered that he couldn't ride the elevator, any elevator. He had made the discovery just before reaching the seventh floor. Panting, he'd got out as fast as he could and despite his heart condition walked up the five floors to the twelfth, only to find the door from the stairway locked. It had meant pounding against the heavy steel frame for half an hour before somebody finally summoned the superintendent, who let him in.

But that was all over, and besides, it belonged to the things that had actually happened. He didn't think about those things any more; he was interested only in things that hadn't happened.

Since he'd stopped going to the office nine weeks ago, Martin wrote in his diary every day from 2 P.M. until he fell asleep. At first he had written down everything he did and saw. But he

© 1977 by Peter Reimold.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wasn't doing much, he soon realized, nor did he see an awful lot of things. So he had switched to writing down all the things he hadn't done or seen. There were lots of those, and when he dozed off in his chair, pencil in hand, it was often with the feeling that he hadn't covered even half of the things that hadn't happened to him during the day.

Gracia moaned weakly from her position under the bed. He hadn't fed her today, not even a bit of dry cheese. He hadn't fed the cat for three days.

He hadn't bought a newspaper today. He hadn't read about any earthquakes in Turkey where there were bodies squashed by collapsing roofs and uprooted streetlamps. He hadn't brushed his teeth today. His brother-in-law hadn't come by for a game of chess. He hadn't sent a birthday card to his blind grandmother in St. Louis. He hadn't been born today, coughing and screaming as he was held toward the cold light.

He hadn't been married to anybody in a Greek Orthodox church. He hadn't walked three times around the outer altar, led by the priest and tied to his bride by a silver ribbon extending from the little crown on his head to the little crown on her head. The priest hadn't repeated the blessings three times in Greek and three times in English. The bride hadn't screamed as the priest cut her into three parts, one for God, one for the devil, and one for Martin.

He hadn't prayed today.

He hadn't edited the second chapter of Fanninger's book on hormones. He hadn't touched his freelance work for three weeks now. There was no point in doing it because he couldn't send it to the publisher. He didn't get his mail, and he wasn't sending any. He could have tied a white parachute to the package and dropped it out the window onto Second Avenue, with a message to send it to the publisher. Tomorrow he might do it.

There hadn't been any taxi sliding along the slippery road into the old woman trying to cross Thirty-fifth Street. There hadn't been any ambulance arriving at the scene to take away the crushed bloody body of the woman. The dogs in the street hadn't sniffed the flesh of the woman, baring their teeth and growling at each other.

Martin yawned and stuck his pencil in the electric pencil sharpener. Nothing happened. His apartment hadn't had any electricity for two days. At first he'd written checks to pay his various

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bills, but when Lydia, his wife, had left, he'd stopped getting his mail and with it the bills and last reminders to pay Con Edison.

Martin pulled the pencil out of the sharpener and took the carving knife from the window sill. He watched the traffic on Second Avenue while he peeled thin strips of wood off the pointed end of the pencil.

He licked his lips and scribbled on. Lydia hadn't come to visit him, bringing the cold November air with her. She used to come. During the first two weeks after he'd stopped leaving the apartment, she had come several times, bringing food and the mail. After that she had confined herself to calling him every other day—until the telephone company had cut off the service.

Gracia appeared again in the door and opened her pink mouth. Martin flicked his fingers, and the cat approached him and sniffed his hands. She jumped onto his lap and down again in a second, then she left for the hall, giving vent to a thin miaow.

Gracia hadn't had kittens today. They hadn't popped out of her, one by one, five in all, blind sausages helplessly swimming about the cardboard box and squeaking inaudibly as they were licked by their mother. Gracia hadn't had kittens in years.

Martin yawned again. He mustn't fall asleep now. There was so much more that hadn't happened and still needed to be recorded. He shouldn't have taken 15 milligrams of Librium today, it made him sleepy. There were only five milligrams left now.

He hadn't fed the cat any boiled cod or bits of chicken neck or strips of bacon fat. He hadn't given her any milk or cheese. There wasn't any cheese in the house, and he hadn't bought milk in a long time.

Lydia hadn't asked him to stop tapping the table with his fingers during breakfast. She hadn't said, "I wish you'd stop reading those damned obituaries. You're like an old woman. What's so interesting about people dying whom you didn't know from Adam, who didn't even know you existed?" And he hadn't said, "That doesn't matter. I just like reading them."

He hadn't had any breakfast today.

The building hadn't been on fire. But he'd already covered that. The flat-chested Australian girl and her English husband hadn't come to dinner, but Lydia had come, bringing a smell of cold fresh November air into the apartment.

No, Lydia hadn't come.

She hadn't been wearing the white pants suit with the stylized

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blue-and-green tulips growing up the left side of the jacket. She hadn't worn orange lipstick, and her chestnut-brown hair hadn't been windblown. She hadn't opened the closets and drawers and begun packing her things.

He hadn't found her reading his diary when he returned from the kitchen. She hadn't asked, "Why are you writing down all those things—things that haven't happened?" And he hadn't replied, "No reason. I just like doing it."

Gracia was crying in front of the bathroom door. Martin sharpened the pencil with the carving knife and went on writing. The candle was low.

After this there would be only two more candles.

Lydia hadn't picked up the carving knife. She hadn't asked, "What are you doing with that *knife*?" He hadn't replied, "Sharpening the pencil."

The dogs in the street hadn't torn the flesh from the legs of the old woman. People hadn't been standing on the sidewalks saying, "Look at those dogs. They're wild. They must've been without food for days."

Lydia hadn't gone to the bathroom to brush her hair and wash her hands. The candle flickered. In a minute it would be time to light the next one. He hadn't followed Lydia and watched her face in the mirror as she was brushing her long hair. He had stayed in the kitchen, feeding the cat raw liver, which he'd cut into tiny warm bits with the carving knife. The cat had been so hungry; she hadn't eaten in days.

Gracia was still crying by the bathroom door. He hadn't gone to the bedroom and picked up the knife, and he hadn't returned to the bathroom, holding the knife behind his back. Lydia hadn't watched him in the mirror and said, "Martin, what are you staring at me like that for?"

The flame of the candle shriveled, spat, and went out. Martin heard the cat scratch at the bathroom door. He felt his way over to the dresser. The candles were in the second drawer. He bumped into a chair while crossing to his bedtable, where he kept the matches. He heard the cat jump onto the handle of the bathroom door, which opened with a screeching noise.

Martin yawned, lit the candle, and went back to the rocking chair.

Gracia appeared in the doorway, looking at Martin. She jumped on his lap and walked onto the open diary. She was purring.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

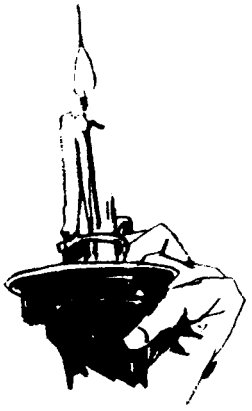
There were two more things that hadn't happened. He had to write them down before he fell asleep.

Lydia hadn't screamed and swayed and fallen into the bathtub like an uprooted streetlamp. And he hadn't let the cat satisfy her hunger.

Martin looked at the page. The white Angora cat had left pawmarks on his last entry.

Three red pawmarks.

Martin closed the diary with a sigh, blew out the candle, and sat in the dark rocking, his eyes closed.



CRIMINALIMERICK

DEPARTMENT OF FIRST STORIES

by D. R. BENSEN

Housewife, student, retiree . . . all cursed
(Or blessed) with unslakable thirst
To get down on paper
That crime, twist, or caper
That will win them their publishing "First."

© *1977 by D. R. Bensen.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

ERNEST SAVAGE

Al Cooper was a man who liked noise—guns, firecrackers, bombs, cannons. His penchant for things that go bang had an eerie and lasting impact on the residents of the exclusive Cherry Hill estates . . .

THE MAN WHO LIKED NOISE

by ***ERNEST SAVAGE***

Al Cooper was one of the nicest fellows you'd ever care to meet. Big strapping man with a ready grin and an open hand. Oh, he had his faults and peculiarities, as who doesn't? He'd fall into moods now and again, for instance, and you wouldn't see him for days in a row, and he didn't like cats or dogs, and he had a rare passion for things that went bang—guns, cannons, firecrackers, cherry bombs, anything that made noise. But on the whole you wouldn't want a nicer neighbor. He'd give you the shirt off his back and he fairly doted on his wife, a thing you don't see too often any more.

Al had made a lot of money in his forties (real-estate speculation, stock market) and bought his place on Cherry Hill before he was 50. Now Cherry Hill is one of a kind—23 estates scattered over its crown and slopes, anywhere from one to four acres each, its single road snaking around the hill, with little offshoots here and there and no way out except the way in. Very private, very exclusive. Big trees all over the place—you can hardly see one house from another—and only one vacant lot left. It has been there since Cherry Hill opened 35 years ago (owned by some outfit back east, I've heard) and if it hadn't been smack dab between Cooper's place and the Gillettes' (now that I think about it, and I'm just *now* beginning to think about it, really), I don't suppose the Cherry Hill killings would have happened. Anyway, until last

© *1977 by Ernest Savage.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

night I wouldn't have wanted to live any place but here. Now I'm not so sure.

I met Al and Martha Cooper the day they moved into the Randall house, across the road and around the bend from mine. He'd bought it for *her* he told me right off, and I got the impression he'd have bought a piece of the moon for her if he could have built a road to it. Said she'd heard about it being for sale after old man Randall died and he didn't even ask the price (which must have been something!)—just bought it for her. That was two and one-half years ago and he's bought her about everything else you can get with money since then—a pool she goes into about twice a year, antique furniture, Paris clothes, foreign sports cars, trips to Europe, you name it.

But Martha wasn't one bit spoiled by it all. A real down-to-earth lady who laughed a lot and did most of her own work around the house and yard, and was the type who would bring over an apple pie every once in a while. I'll miss her something fierce.

That first day I found out more about Cooper than I really wanted to know. He told me how he'd made his money and what he'd done with a lot of it. Showed me his gun collection (both antique and functional) as it came off the truck, even that damn cannon of his. Showed me a big box of fireworks he'd smuggled across the border from Mexico, said he'd throw a neighborhood fireworks party on the Fourth (it was the middle of June when they moved in) and get to meet everybody on the Hill. Said he liked to get to know his neighbors quick, that he valued a good neighbor more than money in the bank. He was one of those men who's all up front and makes you wonder (later) why he lays himself out so quick, what he's hiding. Still, you had to like him.

Bill Peters, the retired actor, came drifting down that day from his place on top of the Hill, and George and Ginny Gillette came over (he was still alive then) with a coffee urn and sandwiches, and it turned into a pickup neighborhood party, the way it happens now and again. We're close-knit up here. We tend to be a little older than the average neighborhood (I'm 62) and we tend to keep tabs on one another a little more than in other places. About the only time a Cherry Hill house trades is when somebody dies or when some youngster has over-reached himself and has to trade back down again.

Yes, we're close and we gather together at the traditional times,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like Christmas, or the Fourth, or when one of our kids (or grandkids) marries, or one of us dies. Almost everybody was out for Ginny Gillette's funeral a couple weeks ago and almost everybody will be out for Al and Martha Cooper's, whenever that's held. Although I'm not so sure about that either, now that I think about it. I've got a lot to think about now.

That first summer Cooper still had his boat down at Newport, where I used to keep mine. Said he'd bought it for Martha, but it turned out she had no stomach for the sea, and he figured he'd keep it just that one season. And he did, too. Sometimes a man will use his wife as a foil for things *he* wants, but not Al. He really doted on that woman.

Anyway, the two of us would go down to Newport once in a while on a weekday (weekends were like the Freeway at quitting time) and cruise the harbor (past Duke Wayne's place, for instance) or out in the channel where he had enough sea room to practise with his cracker shells.

A cracker shell (in case you don't know, which I didn't then) is what they use to scare birds off airport runways or out of a cornpatch, or some such thing. They're regular 12-gauge shotgun shells, except they send out a little wad of explosive that goes off with a loud bang about 75 to 100 yards out, and what Al would do is see how close to the water he could put the charge before it went off. He'd go through a couple boxes at a time out there and didn't often miss; but what he really liked (you could tell it from his eyes) was the noise they made. It did something for him, something way down deep inside.

By that time, of course, Al knew that I'd been a trainer of dogs for the motion picture business, and the last trip we took before he sold the boat, we saw the Duke outside in his patio facing the Bay, stripped to the waist and playing cards, and Al began to question me about the picture business and about dogs and about Duke.

He was in a pensive mood that day, that hail-fellow front of his put aside. We'd been out in the channel that afternoon firing cracker shells and he'd taken that damn cannon of his along, the only time I ever saw it fired. It was a pretty little thing, I must admit, about two feet long, its black iron barrel truncheoned down into a beautifully built step-carriage, like an Old Ironsides, and Al lashed it down on the deck-house roof, pointing aft. He'd brought along a box of the one-inch diameter zinc balls and what

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he did was stick a length of fuse in the hole at the back of the barrel, then pack a scoop of black powder down the muzzle, pack in the wadding and the zinc ball, aim it, light the fuse, and stand back.

I was on the wheel that time and he'd holler "Right rudder" or "Left rudder" from the roof and then "Hold it!" And then I'd hear this big *whoomf!* and look aft to see if he'd hit what he was aiming at, and usually he did. Blow the hell out of it. What he was aiming at was a piece of flotsam out there, and I'm sorry to say there was lots of it around—orange crates, cardboard boxes, deck pillows, junk of all kinds.

But he didn't seem to take his usual pleasure in the game that afternoon, and when we passed the Duke's place back in the Bay and he began asking me questions about my past, it was as though he was trying to find something outside himself to latch onto. Well, I opened my standard bag of yarns about the good old days, but his mind was still somewhere else, out there at sea, I figured.

Anyway, later, on the way home, with the cannon and 12-gauge in the back of his station wagon (he *always* had a gun nearby, I'd learned by then), he asked me why, if I was such a dog man, I didn't have one as a pet, and I gave him the easy answer, not the hard one. I told him that my wife Nettie (she was still alive then) and I were too old to break in a dog to our fussy ways, it wouldn't be fair to any of us.

I didn't tell him the hard answer, that I'd had 17 years of the best dog I ever saw or ever heard of, Lucky Lady, and there was no way she could be replaced. I didn't tell him because I knew by then he didn't like dogs. He had a deep-down feeling against them, a fear. Besides, I don't tell anyone about Lucky Lady, never have. No way to do it.

Well, life went forward on Cherry Hill, stalked by death as it always is. The Forsters were killed on the Freeway a year and a half ago; Bill Peters died peacefully in his sleep last summer; and last January George Gillette and my Nettie passed away within a week of each other. It happens; you survive and wait your turn. There's nothing else to do.

But Al, I think, was at his best when death struck. He seemed to have a keener sense than anyone else of the new absence in your life, of how big it was, how unfillable. He wasn't pushy about it, but his sympathy—or awareness, maybe—was there to draw on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when you needed it. It was a place of unexpected depth in him and it surprised me more than it pleased me. In fact, it didn't please me at all; it was as though he knew something that was unknowable, that shouldn't be known. It made me uneasy.

But I'm carping. Ginny Gillette and Helen Peters and the Forster kids, and even my daughter Marion (when she came down for her mother's funeral) thought the world of Al. Marion said we were all lucky to have him as a neighbor, and I'll leave it at that.

A little after George Gillette died, Ginny got her dog, Leo. He was a Newfoundland, two, maybe three years old, 27 inches at the shoulders, 150 pounds, solid black hair, bright quick eyes, a fast study. Ginny knew, of course, I was the local dog man and asked me what I thought of him and I told her right off—9 on a scale of 10. (Lucky Lady was 10, the only 10 I ever knew.)

Well, that pleased Ginny—confirmed her own feelings about him, she said. Between 'em it was love at first sight, not like a kid with a puppy (with a lot of tail wagging) but like two grown intelligent beings, quiet and solid. There's no devotion like that. It's forever. Ginny (with her bad heart) had expected to die before George and it depressed her that she hadn't. But with Leo there to train and love, she brightened overnight—it was a pleasure to see.

But I didn't even consider getting one for myself. For both reasons, the easy one and the hard. Lucky Lady, in fact, seemed to emerge from the shadows of memory, and during the long silent hours without Nettie, Lucky Lady's eyes seeming to look into mine now and again, with love and patience. Some of them are that way: they live for you and they live in you, and they join you when the time comes. Or you them. I'm more sure of that now than I ever was.

No, instead I took up with Nettie's garden by day and walked the Cherry Hill road by night. Martha Cooper was a brick, as we used to say. She had a way with rhododendrons and other acid-loving plants, and I had none at all. She'd come up of a morning with her green thumb and bag of tricks (and maybe an apple pie) and everything on my acre and a half would be the better for it.

And at night on my walks I'd chat with the neighbors if they were out or if they weren't, with the stars, and sometimes visit with Leo. Ginny Gillette's place sloped away from the road downhill. Standing in front of the vacant treeless site between her place and the Coopers' I could see the full length of her lot,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chain-link fenced all the way from the greenhouse below up to the road. Leo's part of the yard (his night station) was between the greenhouse and Ginny's patio, and sometimes I'd go down the slope by the fence and have a word with him. He'd bark once or twice, but it was just by way of greeting and he'd bark again to say goodbye as I trooped back up the hill. He had a big voice.

One night I saw a light on in Cooper's basement workshop and after my visit with Leo I cut across the vacant lot to the side gate in Cooper's fence and Leo's bark followed me all the way. It was so pointed and determined that I turned around and went back and told him to shut up. Well, he tried, but it took him a while. He didn't want me to go to the Coopers' and he made sure I got the message. I had him just about quiet when Ginny came darting out of her patio door to see what the ruckus was about, and of course that tamed him down all the way. The big brute just curled himself around her legs and grinned.

But he didn't like Cooper, that was clear, and there's always a reason for that—a dog reason if not a man reason.

Cooper was making fireworks that evening. It was the middle of June again (last June) and he was getting ready for the Fourth. By then his fireworks parties had become a tradition, honored by about half of the neighborhood, scorned by the rest. I'd always had the feeling that Martha didn't like them at all, not just because fireworks are illegal (which they are), but because Al was almost embarrassingly childlike in the pleasure he took in them. His eyes would rejoice (as I'd seen them do on the boat that first summer) in the big bang and the unfolding fiery plumage in the sky. Martha had never voiced her opinion, but if you thought about it, it was embarrassing. After all, the man was 52 years old.

But he'd been having trouble with supply in recent years (he told me it was illegal even to ship them) and had begun making his own. That's what he was doing that evening when I came over from Ginny's. He had a half dozen fat cardboard cylinders lined up on the workbench, and he was spooning in formulations of powder and other things, a book of instructions propped up in front of him. He was as absorbed as an alchemist in pursuit of gold and I stayed only long enough for him to tell me what these little babies (that's what he called them, babies) were going to do on the Fourth. Light up the whole sky. They were new, he said, something he'd never tried before.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Back inside I peered at Leo's night station through the screen of trees that rings the Cooper property. I could see him, still standing there by the fence, the intensity of his pose apparent even 75 yards away. A hundred fifty pounds of focused power, black as night. He could have gone over that fence if he wanted to, but he didn't know that yet, and I was hoping he never learned. He wasn't barking, just looking. Something up here stirred his deepest fears, and was beginning to stir mine. I went home disturbed and troubled.

Cooper almost blew his hands off on the Fourth. It was one of those big devils he'd built himself—went off almost the instant he lit the fuse and burned the hell out of his hands and forearms. The crowd was stunned. In the midst of gayety, sudden horror. It was awful. Martha got to him first and then me.

He was just standing there, staring at his hands. I got behind him and put my hands around his waist and told Harry Marsh to phone the hospital and tell them to get ready for a bad burn case. Then Martha and I put him in her car and took him down.

It was enough to make you sick. He sat between us, me at the wheel, the smell of his burnt flesh choking your throat, his forearms stretched rigidly out in front of his chest, his head back, eyes closed, lips writhing in silent pain, his face white as fresh snow. Not a sound came from him.

They were ready for him when we got there and took him in the emergency operating room right away. It was a busy night for them (the Fourth always is, they told me) and we didn't see him again that night. Martha and I were directed to a waiting room and we sat there talking or just sitting silent until they told us finally to go home.

She told me she knew this was going to happen, that he'd hurt himself or kill himself one day with his things that go bang. Then she cried softly, the first tears I'd ever seen her shed, and I went over and got some tissues from the girl and then some coffee from the machine down the hall. But she composed herself quickly and began telling me things about Al's life that he hadn't revealed in that up-front way of his. The important things, I'd guess.

Al was born in Wales, she said, a foundling left at an orphanage door. He never knew his parents, or even who they were. Was adopted and brought to this country as a kid. Lived in Seattle. Earned a law degree when he was 21, but never practiced. Was with the OSS during the war, married her in Washington, did

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

special things for the government during the next ten years, then quit and in the next 10 to 15 years made a fortune. He seemed to have an intuitive feel for the stock market and real-estate speculations. Was generous with his money, gave a lot to orphanages, boys' towns, and summer camps, things for young people, and was truly loved for it. But he was never happy, she said.

She told me all that in a steady calm flow, but her hands were working like rabbits in her lap, the tissues wadded into small damp balls. And then she was silent a long while before she turned to me with tears in her eyes again.

I don't know what it is, she said in a rush, but I'm the only thing that keeps him sane. At first I thought it was his inability to have children, but that's not it. That's not why he gives me so many things, things I don't even want. I thought at first he was trying to make up to me for that lack, but that's not it. I thought that's why he loves so much to shoot guns—to make big bangs, a *macho* thing (you thought that too, didn't you, and I nodded), but that's not it, I don't know what it is. He hardly sleeps at all any more. Before you started walking the road at night, he walked at night, sometimes all night. You didn't know that, did you?

She leaned against me and sighed; she was vastly wearied. I love him, she whispered. He's a tormented man, but so good, so good in so many ways— He's lost, he's somewhere nobody else is, he's alone. Sometimes he looks at me as if—

She never finished that sentence. She sighed again and her head fell heavily against my shoulder and she went to sleep.

Al made a quick, an almost miraculous recovery. I saw him twice during the five days he was in the hospital and one of the doctors told me he'd never seen a burn case recover so fast. At first they thought they'd have to do extensive skin grafting on his wrists and forearms, but it turned out they had to do none at all and it amazed them.

He came home on Saturday, July tenth, and when I saw him the next day he was as up-front cheerful as he'd ever been. He was in his den (where he kept his gun collection and the cannon) enthroned comfortably in his red leather chair, accepting court from a stream of neighbors. He was at his best, but I sat there tuning out the surface charm and trying a little psychic sonar on what was underneath. Martha had told me more than I was comfortable knowing about his past, and last night, Leo had told me more than I was comfortable knowing about his here and now.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The five days Al had been in the hospital, Leo was as relaxed as a boiled sock. But last night he'd been at the fence again, facing Cooper's place, tense and watchful. I'd stood up on the road, out of his sight and scent, and watched him for a half hour. He'd stand at the fence a few minutes at a time, unmoving, then dance around with frustration and put his big paws up on the fence as though trying to climb over. Now and again he'd bark, not loud, but low and businesslike. He'd not seen Al come home and Al hadn't appeared outside, but Leo knew he was there and he didn't like it.

And I didn't like it either. I'm not psychic and make no pretense of being so. I'm not like Lucky Lady or Leo, who can draw on atavistic sources long dead in us; but I had the powerful feeling something awful was going to happen (which did) and maybe I could stop it. I'm not going to kill myself that I didn't, but I'm deeply saddened now, and will always wonder.

Al did the expected thing. When his burns had healed enough, he took Martha on a thirteen-week cruise around the world. It was predictable. It is what a rich man does after a death, accident, or operation. It was the expected thing and I'd learned that Al did the expected thing, when he could determine what it was, and then usually overdid it. It was as though he was living some prototype of life, not his, but some model he'd chosen to follow.

I saw them off at San Pedro—champagne in the cabin and flowers all over the suite. It was a happy time and I must say I liked Al then as much as I ever had. You couldn't help it. And I loved Martha. You couldn't help that either, or at least I couldn't. The last thing I saw were her eyes, pleading with me to understand, maybe to forgive. Her eyes hung in my mind (the way Lucky Lady's still do) long after the boat disappeared.

They came back three weeks ago yesterday, laden with loot from every port they'd touched. Al had guns, both antique and new for his collection, boxes of Chinese firecrackers (from Hong Kong), and cases of stuff to give away.

They threw a party the second night they were back and Al distributed the presents (much too expensive; he'd overdone it again) to everybody on the hill. It was awkward, for me anyway (he gave me an embarrassingly expensive porcelain statuette of a dog that looked uncannily like Lucky Lady, and how he did *that*, I'll never know). But most people were pleased, not only with what they got, but to have Al and Martha back again, as if the family were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

complete once more.

Not me, though. I guess I knew too much, and sensed more than I knew, but couldn't puzzle it out. Leo for instance. The night of the party he went through that routine at the fence again. Now, there's a wide stretch of rock and mesquite-strewn arroyo surrounding Cherry Hill and there are still enough rabbits living there to arouse a dog's business sense; but outside of a little banter with them Leo had been a model citizen during the Coopers' absence.

But that night Leo was tense again. That was one thing, and Martha's eyes were another. Every time they touched mine there was that flashing plea in them, as though—as though what? That's what got me—as though what? The trip had aged her. Her face was deeply lined under the tan she'd acquired on the seven seas.

I walked the road long that night after the party, and the next night and the next. I saw Leo in that strained pose of his at the fence every time I passed and heard his occasional bursts of barking. But I didn't go down. He'd have to work it out himself, he and Al.

It was the fifth night after they returned, a Tuesday, cold, the first frost of the year. After the eleven o'clock news I went for my usual walk and heard Leo's bark the first step I took out of the door. On the road I passed the Coopers' and then the vacant lot and then Ginny's and then the Marshes', next to Ginny's. I was walking fast, but the sound stopped me dead in my tracks. I hadn't heard it for a long time, but there was no mistaking it, the sharp flat snap of a cracker shell.

I thought, well, Cooper's done it at last. He's laid a shell in Leo's face to scare him into silence. And it worked. I stood there for a full minute and heard nothing else, no bark, no nothing. And no lights flicking on along the road as they would have in summer. People were asleep, their windows closed. I shivered and turned and continued on around the hill to home and bed.

Helen Marsh found Ginny's body the next morning at ten, and came directly to me. We went back down together. Ginny was in the patio on her back, her arms spread out. The patio door was open, the living-room lights on, the TV on. Helen had come over for her usual midmorning coffee break with Ginny, found the front door unlocked, went in when Ginny didn't respond to her ring, and found her.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Now she turned her back and was crying into her hands, grieving. I led her back in the house, sat her down, and spent the next half hour making the necessary phone calls, searching for her son's number in Lincoln, Nebraska. Harry Marsh came home from his studio to be with his wife, but nobody else knew about it until later that afternoon. Nobody else but Al.

They took her body away at noon. Her doctor and a deputy coroner agreed on the cause of death, obviously heart attack, and the thing was done with speed.

I was alone then in the Gillettes' house and went out to the patio and stood where Ginny's body had been and looked up at Cooper's house. I saw no sign of life or movement behind his trees, but didn't expect to. Didn't want to. Then I got down on my hands and knees and crawled around on the patio and the grass next to it and found a half dozen specks of white waxy paper stuff, shreds of the casing around the explosive charge in the cracker shell.

I got up again and looked at Cooper's. Al had stood up there last night and fired off a cracker shell to scare Leo into silence and just as he pulled the trigger Ginny must have come darting out the door in that quick, birdlike way of hers to shut Leo up and the charge had gone off a yard or so in front of her face, stopped the heart, and blown her down on her back. I'd known it could not have been any other way from the moment I saw her body.

But why say anything? What good would it do? The thing was done, Ginny was gone.

And Leo was gone too. Nobody had thought to ask about him all morning, but I'd wondered from the first. I thought maybe he was hiding out behind the greenhouse or in the toolshed, or in the garage; but when I looked for him he wasn't anywhere and I wasn't surprised. He was no faint-heart. He wouldn't hide. He might run, but he wouldn't hide, and what he'd done was run. But there was no trace of him.

I don't know how to describe Al at Ginny's funeral. It wasn't so much that he was in a state of shocked mourning (we were all that), it was that he had a kind of glazed-over, locked-in look. Ginny's son had flown in from Nebraska the night of the day she died and taken full charge of the arrangements. He'd asked me and Al and Harry Marsh and three other neighbor men to act as pall bearers and Al was placed in the middle of the left side of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

casket, just ahead of me and I couldn't have taken my eyes off him even if I'd wanted to. He didn't say a word from the beginning to the end, and when he moved it was as if he were an automaton, counting the steps forward, the turns, the stops. I'd never seen him so distant, so self-absorbed.

Of course he knew he'd killed her. He must have seen her run out the door when he fired and fall back when the shell went off. And probably he'd gone down to check. Small wonder his movements were stiff and unnatural, his eyes inward-seeing.

But why had he fired at Leo? Did he want merely to shock him into silence, or kill him, or what? What was between them? What did Leo know about Al that we were too insensitive to know and he too tongueless to tell?

I didn't see Al again until nearly a week after Ginny's funeral. I was out walking and saw him in the arroyo on the far side of the hill, a half mile from home. It was near midnight. I'd been searching the arroyo myself that night, thinking Leo might be down there somewhere mourning. A good dog will do that sometimes: he'll go away and mourn and then return.

Al was almost 50 yards from where I stopped when I saw him. He was crouched in a listening pose, his back to me, the barrel of a gun in his hand glinting in the light of a clear-night moon. He was hunting. I felt a thrill rush up my spine at the sight of him, but after a moment I turned and went away.

He was out the next three nights, and then again last night—for the last time. I could spot him from high points on the road all around the hill. He'd walk a while, then listen, sit on a rock and wait, then walk again. Leo was out there too, but I never saw him and I don't think Al did either. Leo had a different plan. But whatever it was between them (I told myself) it was theirs to resolve, not mine, and I stayed back.

It was after one o'clock last night when I quit the eerie game and started home. On the way past the Coopers' house I saw the dance of a flashlight behind the trees. It was Martha, poking along the edge of their lot nearest Ginny's. She was wearing something white that trailed on the ground behind her and showed luminescently in the light of the moon. I wanted to go and tell her that what she hunted couldn't be found by her, only by Al. But I didn't. I wanted to tell her to come home with me and let Al run the game to its end, but I didn't. I should have interceded three or four times in the course of these events, but I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

didn't, and that's another thing I'll carry with me for a long time.

I went home, made a drink, and turned on the TV. Halfway through the second late late show I fell asleep, a light twitchy sleep. I didn't know what it was at first that wakened me, but it was something felt as well as heard, a kind of *whoomf* sound that shook the air. A thin predawn light trickled through my windows. I got up, went out, and listened some more from my front yard, and then went down to Cooper's place.

Martha was on her back the way Ginny had been, her arms spread wide. She was by the gate leading to the vacant lot. The gate was open. The flashlight was on the ground a yard from her right hand, and it was dead too. In the thin steely light of that hour I could see the fear still locked in her eyes, or thought I could. I closed them gently. Her mouth was open, her jaw rigid. Maybe she'd screamed, maybe she hadn't. It was hard for me to press her lips closed, but she looked better when I did, more peaceful in the long white dress she was wearing. I whispered goodbye.

Al was seated, comfortable-looking, in his red leather chair in the den. He had pushed it around to face the low cabinet top on which he kept the cannon. He'd nailed the four wooden wheels of the cannon carriage to the wooden top of the cabinet with eight-penny nails. I hadn't heard the sound of hammering.

What I'd heard, and felt, was the sound of the cannon going off. The muzzle was about four feet from his chest and the zinc ball had smashed his heart before it blew itself out the back of the chair and into the wall behind. There was no mistaking the smell of cordite—it was fresh and heavy in the room. A thin gray line of fuse ash snaked across about a foot of the cabinet top and there was a small pile of it on the floor below. He must have cut about a yard of fuse and it must have burned for a half minute while he sat there and waited and watched.

His head had fallen forward on his chest. I raised it and was shocked at how pale and gaunt his face had grown in just a few days. And nights. I eased his head back down gently.

Then I went back outside to where Martha was and in the rosy golden tints of dawn I laid her arms across her breast. She looked better that way—as though she'd just lain down and died in peace, instead of unthinkable fear.

I said goodbye to her again, went out the open gate and across the vacant lot to Ginny's gate below the greenhouse and up her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

terraced back yard to the patio where Leo was. At first glance he appeared to be asleep, but I knew he was dead before I touched him. I knew he had to be.

He was a mess, his coat tangled and dirty, and he must have lost 50 pounds. He'd laid himself down exactly where his mistress had died, and it had to be that way too. Dogs work by patterns that men can't read, and when they have a thing to do, the good ones will get it done at any cost.

There hadn't been a mark on Martha. Leo had simply frightened her to death and then come home to die himself. His real enemy was Al and always had been and I have no doubt Leo knew that from the first. And he knew also how best to destroy him—to kill the only thing Al loved, the only thing Al *could* love, Martha, his one tie to life.

I picked Leo up, carried him down to the toolshed, got a shovel, and then went down into the arroyo and buried him. If any of the others had wondered about him, where'd he'd gone, now they'd never know.

Then I went back home and sat in my breakfast room and watched the sun rise above the big hills to the east, and I thought about Al. Most men, when they kill themselves, put a bullet through the head. Very seldom the heart. But Al, to kill himself good and true, had driven a one-inch zinc ball through his heart. Not a wooden stake, but a zinc ball.

It was all he had, and maybe he knew it was the only way to make sure.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS

All subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 2600, Greenwich, Connecticut 06830.

For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving. Send us your current mailing label with new address.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* detective story by

PETER GODFREY

Ferris was not a detective by profession, but he had a flair for investigation and an instinct for the truth. Rebecca Brink, only twelve years old—"the shy little sprite as removed from the everyday world as gossamer"—confessed to killing her sister's husband, and the corroborative evidence was overwhelming. But Ferris knew the child—down deep he felt she could not commit murder. If only he had got her letter in time . . .

TO HEAL A MURDER

by PETER GODFREY

It was nearly eight months since Ferris had last opened the front door of his little Richmond flat. At that time he had thought he would be away only two weeks, on a package tour to Rumania. Now, after many vicissitudes and constant fears, he was back—and safe. It was an occasion—a triumphant return home.

Only—it wasn't. The floor and furniture in the entrance hall were gray with dust. The pile of letters lay higgledy-piggledy on the floor, just as they had dropped through the letter flap. He felt like a stranger. He remembered with sudden nostalgia his newspaper days when he was always in close touch with friends. Not for the first time in weeks he cursed his new employers, secretive and all-powerful, who demanded his absolute dedication—and gave in return nothing basically human, not even real thanks.

Lost, he picked up the pile of letters and tried to sort them into chronological order by postmark. They were mostly circulars.

But the one that ended on top of the pile had been mailed in Brighton the day he had left on his trip. The handwriting meant nothing to him. He opened the envelope, drew out the notepaper, and glanced at the signature. Rebecca. Of course, the little girl at 63—Rebecca Brink.

© 1977 by Peter Godfrey.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Dear Mr. Joe," said the letter, "I know I should have written before, but really there hasn't been much news. Esther, as you know, has married Mr. Binns, and we're all living together in a big house in Brighton.

"Mr. Joe, I wish you were here right now. You see, I've got a terrible problem to face—something I can't even discuss with Esther. You're the only one I know I could talk to. I wish you were here—but of course I couldn't have the cheek to ask you to come down specially, could I? But I am praying to God that you will have business in Brighton soon. All my love, Rebecca."

There were several lines scrawled below the signature. "P.S. I am really trying to follow your advice—you know, about going out more and meeting people. I've joined a fencing club, where there are lots of other girls and boys. At least ten. I was a bit shy at first, but I'm getting to know them better now. P.P.S. Please try and come."

Somehow the letter prodded Ferris' feeling of unease. He took it next door to Mrs. Venner. "Those girls who used to live at 63," he said, "the Brink sisters. You remember, the older one, Esther, left for Brighton to marry a man named Binns. Do you know if she is still living at the same address?"

Mrs. Venner shook her head. "Probably not. I should say that house would have been too full of bitter memories for her."

Ferris said slowly, "Bitter memories?"

"Yes. Oh, of course, you were away at the time. It was a horrible case—particularly to people who knew them."

"What happened, Mrs. Venner?"

"Well, you remember the sister—the girl you were always talking to—Rebecca?"

"Yes?"

"About three weeks after you left she murdered her brother-in-law."

Ferris said, "No, Mrs. Venner, no. Not that little girl."

Early the next day he was at Brighton police headquarters.

"I remember the case well," said Inspector Coombes. "It was a nasty business, but no doubt about the verdict, no doubt at all."

"What actually happened?"

"Well, as you know, this girl Esther Brink married a Brighton estate agent named Charles Binns. Her sister, Rebecca, a girl just turning twelve, came to live with them at their home here.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"As far as we could find out afterwards, the household seemed a happy one, although the girl, Rebecca, didn't seem to get on very well with her brother-in-law. Not that there were any quarrels, but she seemed to try and avoid him."

Ferris said, "She was a shy child—it would take her a long time to adjust to a new member of her family."

"Yes. That's what the psychiatrist said—but I'll come to that later. Let's first get the facts straight. The chain of incidents started when Mrs. Binns slipped on the stairs and sprained her ankle badly. She was laid up in bed the following day, a Saturday.

"The housekeeper had been sent on an errand by Mr. Binns. He was home and so was Rebecca, who was keeping Mrs. Binns company. At about 2:30 p.m. Binns called up the stairs and asked if Rebecca would help him for a short while in the study. She seemed unwilling to go. Remember that point, it becomes significant later. Anyway, Mrs. Binns asked her not to be disobliging, and eventually she went.

"Mrs. Binns, as I have said, was lying in bed. A short while later she heard Rebecca running rapidly up the stairs, and then the sound of her sobbing on the landing. Thoroughly alarmed, she hobbled out of bed. She found her sister in an hysterical condition. She asked what was the matter and Rebecca answered, 'Oh, Esther, I've killed Charles!'

"Mrs. Binns acted with great presence of mind. She picked up the telephone and dialed the number of her next-door neighbor, Dr. Jack Morgan. Morgan was out, but his wife, who is also an M.D., answered the call. As soon as she had finished speaking, Mrs. Binns tried to hobble down the stairs, but before she had gone more than a few steps, Dr. Betty Morgan arrived and ordered her back to bed.

"In the study, Dr. Morgan found the body of Binns. She saw at once that he had been stabbed through the left lung and life was extinct. She immediately telephoned us, and I was at the house within twenty minutes."

Ferris was very still. "Go on," he said.

"As I've stressed, there were no complications. The medical evidence was that the cause of death was a stab wound in the left lung, delivered from below and upwards. The weapon was lying on the carpet near the door. It was a large paper knife which Binns used to keep on his desk. On it were the girl's fingerprints,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in a position consistent with her subsequent story that she'd stabbed Binns by thrusting the knife at him in the way she'd learned to thrust a foil in fencing."

Ferris said, unbelieving, "Just like that?"

"Yes. It was an open-and-shut case. The next day she was brought before a special juvenile court, remanded for a week, and then committed for trial to the Crown Court before a High Court judge."

"But why did they say she did it? What was her motive?"

Coombes shrugged. "Let me put it to you this way. You know that at the trial of a juvenile on a serious charge, the judge usually leans over backwards to find extenuating circumstances. Well, Judge Boxham asked her the same question. At first she wouldn't answer; then she said there had been a quarrel, and she wouldn't give any reason for it. Remember her sister's evidence how unwilling Rebecca had been to do any favor for her brother-in-law? There can't be much doubt about what happened. Binns asked her to do something, she was sullen and refused. Binns got up, perhaps in anger, perhaps to punish, and she grabbed the knife and stabbed."

"Not that way," said Ferris. "Not that little girl."

"No? Even the defense adopted the standpoint that's what must have happened. A psychiatrist gave evidence to help her. He pointed out that Rebecca was a child who had been very much shocked at the death of her own father, that she had been brought up in a very sheltered fashion by her sister, and that unconsciously she would resent her sister's husband as an interloper in her ordered family life. His argument was that although the child was sane, at the time of the murder she was so seriously upset emotionally that any argument with her brother-in-law could have assumed gigantic proportions in her mind."

"And the judge—what did he think of that?"

"He seemed sympathetic, but—well, he questioned the child, you know. There had been no real provocation. She knew what she had done and could assess the consequences of her action. The jury was in no doubt. The verdict and sentence were inevitable."

" 'Detained at Her Majesty's pleasure,' " said Ferris. "But I *know* that child, I tell you. I can't believe that's the whole story."

Coombes hesitated. "Look, Mr. Ferris, apart from the evidence, there's something I heard later, in confidence. I'll tell you what I'll do. You see the girl, her sister, and all the other witnesses.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Then if you're still not satisfied, come back to me. I'll tell you then what I know, to add to all the other evidence."

"Why not tell me now?"

"Look, it was a confidence, and I don't want to share it unless it's really necessary. Besides, at this stage you've made up your mind the kid's innocent, and if I tell you now it won't alter your opinion. But if you hear it in addition to what the others tell you—"

"Then I will see the others first. But I'll be back."

All the way to the Borstal, Ferris was thinking of Rebecca as he had known her, as the shy little sprite as much removed from the everyday world as gossamer. And yet she had not been all timorousness; sometimes unexpected facets glinted. Twinkles of elfin humor, and once—what was it he had said to her? Oh, yes, something about Esther taking care of her. And she had answered, with her face puckered seriously and full conviction in her tones, "You know, Mr. Joe, I look after Esther even more than Esther looks after me."

She spoke to him like that, as to a trusted friend.

He had known, of course, that somewhere, sometime, life would bruise that unworldly little personality. In his own way he had tried to cushion the shock in advance. He had given her joking, kindly advice—he, sick-joke Ferris, trying to be jocular! Perhaps that was why he felt a pang of shame when he thought of the plea in her letter. If he had only been there to answer her call—

Now, after eight months, facing her in the barred room, he caught his breath in anger and frustration. The butterfly, flitting nervously and fascinatedly from wonder to wonder, had been impaled, and her colors had faded. In her new world her uniform was gray. So were her eyes, her expression, and even—shockingly—her voice.

"Yes, Mr. Joe. I killed him. That's why I'm here."

"Rebecca, you can tell me the truth. If you're lying to protect someone—you can trust me."

"I wouldn't lie to you, Mr. Joe. I did kill him."

"But why? Why? What was your reason?"

"We had a quarrel—but that doesn't excuse me. The judge said so. And you mustn't be sorry for me, Mr. Joe. I'm a murderer. I did a bad thing and I have to be punished for it."

He tried a small joke. "Rebecca, you're my friend. My friends

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

don't kill people merely because of a quarrel."

She said nothing.

"Wasn't there something else? Did he try to do anything or say anything that frightened or disgusted you?"

This time her eyes opened wide, in a kind of curious surprise. "You mean—kiss me? No, Mr. Joe, nothing like that."

"Then what sort of quarrel did you have?"

"I can't tell you, Mr. Joe, not now. It wouldn't do any good."

The "not now" touched a nerve. He said heavily, "That letter you wrote me, Rebecca—I never got it until two days ago. I was abroad. I came as soon as I read it."

Her face was set, a mask.

"Tell me this, at least. Why did you hate him?"

"I didn't mean to listen, Mr. Joe, but I couldn't help hearing. He was talking to a lady about money and business. He was horrible and cruel. She cried . . . That was when we first came to the house. I thought he was a beast, but Esther loved him . . . I killed him. That's murder, and there's no excuse. One thing's got nothing to do with the other."

Ferris said, "I must go now, Rebecca. I'll be seeing Esther tomorrow. I'll tell her I visited you."

"Give her my love." The voice was drab, impersonal. "If you press the buzzer, the screw will come and fetch me."

He pressed. The screw came. She started to lead the girl away.

"Goodbye," said Ferris.

"Goodbye." And then pleasantly, politely, "I'm sorry, Mr. Joe. Perhaps if you had got my letter in time—"

The phrase haunted him. If he had got her letter in time—

Esther Binns, sunk into her own personal misery, was no help at all. "I just can't understand it, Mr. Ferris. When Charles came . . . How can I explain? I didn't even think of Rebecca. Not right then. Charles was—well, not like other men I'd ever met. He was so strong, so direct. He wanted me and I wanted him. To marry him seemed so good, so right for all of us. And now we're scattered. Charles dead, Rebecca. . ."

She reached out an urgent hand to clutch his sleeve. "Sometimes I think the fault's mine, Mr. Ferris, all mine. After our father went, I was so afraid of losing her that I wrapped her in cottonwool. Maybe I sheltered her too much. Maybe . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Other witnesses. Basically the same, varying only in the depth of their sympathy. Like pretty, young Dr. Betty Morgan: "I could weep for the child. But what else could I have done, Mr. Ferris? I had to give my evidence."

"Wasn't there something over and above the evidence? After all, you were the family doctor. Isn't there anything you can tell me about Binns or the child that will throw some light on the motive for the murder?"

"Nothing. It's true, I used to be Binns's doctor, but after he married again he asked specifically for my husband to call. I suppose he thought the new Mrs. Binns would not approve of a woman doctor. So you see, I only happened to know Rebecca because we were neighbors. I don't think I'd spoken a dozen words to the child before the murder."

"You said that Binns married again. I didn't know he was a widower."

"He wasn't. He was divorced from his first wife."

"I see. Tell me this, Doctor, what kind of man was he?"

"Respected. Respectable. Selfish—as I suppose most men are. Otherwise, just a neighbor."

And yet, the doubt remained. He sought out Inspector Coombes. "You said if I came back unsatisfied—?"

"I remember," said the Inspector. He paused. "I must tell you this—the information was brought to me only after the trial. The person concerned did not come forward at the time because she hated Binns and, quite frankly, did not want to assist in condemning anyone who had caused his death."

"I understand. Go on."

"The woman was Mrs. Joan Binns, the former wife of the murdered man. She was an eyewitness. On the day of the crime she wanted to speak to Binns. For purely personal reasons—she didn't want to meet the new Mrs. Binns—she went round the side of the house to the French windows leading to her ex-husband's study, in the hope that he would be there alone. As she reached the window, she saw Binns coming round his desk towards Rebecca. The girl whipped up the paper knife, thrust it in his chest, and as he collapsed, ran hysterically from the room. Mrs. Binns, quite understandably, also made herself scarce."

Coombes furrowed his brows at the unexpected reaction to his statement. Ferris sat upright and there was a gleam in his eye.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He said, "Yes. It could be that. Yes"—and he was obviously talking to himself. He looked at Coombes apologetically. "I'm sorry. You see, the only thing that kept me going on this investigation was that I knew the girl. But now there's something else. A chance. Where can I see Mrs. Joan Binns?"

Coombes said, "I'll take you there myself. But I can't see why—"

"I'll explain afterwards," said Ferris.

She lived in a chrome-and-glass hotel, and she was at home. She took them into a private lounge. She leaned forward in her chair, blonde and willowy and appealing, and said, "What do you want to know?"

Coombes told her, and when he had finished, she looked at Ferris.

"Only a few questions," he said. "Binns's attitude when he came round the desk—would you say it was threatening?"

She shook her head regretfully. "I'm sorry. I can't say. The whole thing happened so quickly."

"Then let's take the child. How did she react? When she grabbed the knife, and thrust, was it in panic?"

"Panic, or anger, I don't know which. But there was violent emotion in the action."

"What makes you say that?"

"Well, it's hard to explain. She grabbed the knife and struck, but when the blade was going home you could see that only then she realized what she was doing. She let go her grip on the knife and stepped back. She became obviously hysterical almost before Charles fell to the carpet. As he slumped she was already running out of the room."

Ferris said, "Thank you. Yes, thank you. And now, just one more thing. What sort of man was your ex-husband?"

She looked at him, puzzled. "A man. Like most men, I suppose—but we had differences. That's why I divorced him." She added flippantly, "*De mortuis*."

"No," said Ferris, and the vehemence of his attitude caught her attention. "I want the truth. It is the living I am thinking of. I can't explain but, believe me, it is vital that I know what Binns was really like. I've heard from others—that he was successful, virile, a normal man. But you know the other side. Please, will you help me?"

"If it's that important," she said, "yes."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Thank you. Now tell me, why did you divorce him?"

"Well, there were temperamental differences—we hadn't got on well together for a long time. But that wasn't the basic reason for breaking up. It was because he—I find it very difficult to put it in words, Mr. Ferris."

Ferris said seriously, "Tell me anyway you like."

"It was something I found out about him. You see, I'm a woman who makes friends easily, and I was very much in love with Charles. So, in the first few months of marriage, I found it natural to tell him everything that was told me. He used to encourage me, Mr. Ferris. He used to say he loved me so much he hated every moment I was away from him, and he wanted to hear everything that I had seen or done or heard. So I told him—all the little chronicles of my day-to-day activities and sandwiched among them, things I should never have told. Secrets confided to me by my friends.

"Oh, it took me a long time to find out what was happening. I couldn't understand why, through the years, I lost friends as quickly as I made them. And one day I asked a woman with whom I had been very close. She told me.

"Charles had been blackmailing her—on something he had learned from me. And then I checked further. I went to see the others, and they told me the same story. So I divorced Charles. Quietly, and on other grounds. But what I've told you was the real reason."

"Poor Rebecca," said Ferris. "She made the same discovery."

"No wonder they talk about blind justice," said Coombes.

The medical officer had just left to draft a new report. Coombes's coffee, which had been hot when Ferris started his explanation, was now cold. He picked up the cup abstractedly, then put it down without tasting the coffee. "I will act immediately, of course. I'll send men out, get new statements, apply for a warrant—"

Ferris said, "Rebecca?"

Coombes sat up suddenly. "There may be a way of cutting the red tape. A pardon. Bloxham, the judge who tried the case, lives in Brighton. When he knows all the facts, I'm sure he'll help. If he contacts the Home Secretary—"

"Yes," said Ferris. "But even before him we must see the girl's sister." . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

After the first convulsive spasm of weeping Esther Binns said, "You're not just telling me this? You're quite sure?"

Ferris said gravely, "We're quite sure."

"Rebecca, my little Rebecca. What can I do to make this up to her? What can I do?"

"Just tell her the truth and help her to understand it."

Mr. Justice Bloxham sipped moodily at his whiskey.

Ferris said, "Ever since I heard the evidence, I was convinced that this girl would not stab a man in a fit of anger, or even because she disliked him intensely. No, there would have to be something much deeper behind it. And then, when I heard the truth about Binns—about what kind of man he really was—I saw the whole situation as it must have occurred.

"You know, Rebecca had a strange idea of herself as the guardian of her sister's happiness. She once said to me, 'I look after Esther even more than Esther looks after me.' Now imagine the situation in the house: Esther deeply in love with Binns; Rebecca at first happy for her sister's sake, and then making the discovery that Binns was a despicable blackmailer. Gentlemen, try and put yourself into that child's mind. She couldn't bring herself to tell Esther, to shatter her happiness. So she taxed Binns that fateful afternoon when he called her down to his study.

"And now consider Binns a moment. There he was, a hardened man of the world, a practised trader in sordidness. Not only could Rebecca have no chance of influencing such a mind, it probably took Binns only a second to realize that if she was speaking to him direct, then she would never tell Esther. Knowing her, he could guess her motives; and knowing her motives he could turn the situation to his own advantage.

"Instead of displaying the repentance the child hoped for, the man laughed at her. He told her that if Esther knew of the situation she would probably kill herself, and if Rebecca would not assist him actively in his schemes, he would tell Esther himself.

"And at that psychological moment he came round the desk at her, asserting himself, trying to underline what he had said by the menace of proximity. And the child, partly in panic, partly in frustration, but mainly actuated by a deep primitive urge to defend her sister, to remove this threat to her happiness, grabbed the paper knife and thrust."

Judge Bloxham said musingly, "Yes—a reflex action. You're

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

right, Mr. Ferris, both in your evidence and your inferences. Poor innocent!" He shuddered. "When I think what I have done to that child!"

Inspector Coombes said tactfully, "What else could you have done, sir? After all, the facts were overwhelming. The child confessed. How could anyone have imagined she was actually innocent of murder?"

"Mr. Ferris did. So clearly, Inspector, that he was able to force a confession from the real murderer."

Ferris interposed gently. "Don't forget I know Rebecca well. Look, if even Esther didn't realize, why should you—a stranger, sitting in a courtroom of strangers?"

"Possibly, but . . . I have arranged to see the Home Secretary first thing in the morning. Matters will be rectified as quickly as possible. God help me, I wish I could unscar that child's mind."

Ferris said, "Perhaps there is a way."

"How?"

"Come with me and Mrs. Binns to break the news to Rebecca. She'll recognize you as the man who condemned her. If you can help me to convince her she is not a murderer, then in time—"

"Yes, you're right again. Thank you. Of course I will come."

The same gray room and the same gray child. With three others—a judge, a woman, an old friend.

Ferris said gently, "Rebecca, your sister has something to tell you."

The child listened, grayly, politely.

"Rebecca, darling, I know now. I know all about Charles. About—what you didn't want to tell me."

"I'm glad you know, but—"

"If I had only realized at the beginning . . . a man like that . . . Rebecca, I'm glad he's dead."

"No, Esther, you mustn't say that. Murder's the worst crime there is, even worse than . . . Your knowing doesn't make much difference, really. I killed him. I'm a murderer."

The judge intervened. "Rebecca, you mustn't think that way. If I'd only known at the trial what your motives were . . . And besides, Rebecca, you didn't murder him."

"I . . . didn't. . .?"

"No, Please . . . you explain, Mr. Ferris."

Ferris said, "Listen carefully, Rebecca, I want you to under-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stand, and it's not very easy. First, we know that when you quarreled with Binns, in panic and anger you picked up the knife and thrust exactly as you had been taught to thrust in your fencing class. We know you did it without thinking, and that as soon as you realized you had stabbed him, you let go the handle of the knife and ran out. The last you saw of him he was slumped on the carpet with the knife in his chest."

The gray shivered. "Yes."

"Now you must remember the doctor at the trial said that the knife had gone into the left lung. You will also remember the police said they found the knife on the floor."

"But I stabbed him. He died. So I'm guilty of murder."

"No, you aren't. The truth is, you did not cause his death. Binns was murdered, yes—*but not by you.*"

"I stabbed him—"

"Yes, you did stab him, Rebecca—you stabbed him in the lung. Let me explain this way. A knife wound in the lung doesn't necessarily kill a person. *He can still be healed.* If a doctor comes quickly enough, there is an emergency procedure. The knife is left in the wound to halt unnecessary bleeding. The chest is bound very tightly so that only shallow breathing is possible, and then the patient is operated on to stitch up the wound. So you see, it's possible the thrust of the knife need not have caused death."

The gray trembled. "But—"

"Wait, Rebecca. *You did not cause his death.* He died because the knife was removed, letting the blood flow into his lungs, killing him in a matter of moments."

"But who—"

"Dr. Betty Morgan, Rebecca. He was blackmailing her, and she hated him. We've seen her and she has confessed. She told us how she came into the study, saw him lying there, and realized in one terrible moment how she could murder him and put the blame on you. She put on her surgical gloves so as not to leave her fingerprints over yours. Then she killed him, Rebecca—not by stabbing him, *but by pulling out the knife.*"

Something fluttered in the girl's eyes. She said, "Does that mean I can go home soon?"

Mr. Justice Bloxham delivered his considered verdict: "It means you can go home *now.*"

Rebecca said, "Esther!" and cried like a little girl.

"I think," said Ferris, "that I too can now go home."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

ISAK ROMUN

A curious story, its meaning elusive, tantalizing . . . The usual mandatory retirement age is 65. Are men prepared for life-after-65? Perhaps the cutoff in the future will not be a matter of simply reaching a specific age. Suppose, after a certain age, in order to retire with dignity, all men have to pass a certain annual test?

THE FINAL TEST

by *ISAK ROMUN*

Dinkelacker had fallen behind, but he comforted himself with the thought that it wasn't because he couldn't keep up, it was because he had purposely stayed back to help Dr. Pontoser.

About a half hour out Pontoser had turned an ankle. Anticipating this possibility, he had secreted an ace bandage beneath his T-shirt. He whipped out the elastic band and quickly wound it around the swelling joint. Little beads of perspiration stood out on Pontoser's forehead even though it wasn't hot. It was early morning, only a few minutes' past eight, and blessed clouds shielded the sun.

As he wound the bandage with practiced hands—hands that nevertheless shook from sixty-odd years of strenuous living and serving—Pontoser looked up and smiled, his features a wreath of hope.

"I'm all right, Dink," the doctor said. "I've done this walk twenty-three times. Always finished. Intend to finish today. One year I was third. Got the bronze."

Pontoser secured the bandage with two metal frogs, lightly tapped the ankle, and said, "Ready to go, Dink. Give a guy a hand up."

© *1977 by Isak Romun.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dinkelacker pulled the doctor to his feet and they continued their walk down the road. It was evident, however, before they had pushed many yards farther, that the doctor was favoring his injured foot. Dinkelacker tried to keep concern from his face, but Pontoser, looking up at the taller, younger man, saw his expression.

"A twinge, only a twinge. Don't worry. Think the others are far ahead?"

"I don't imagine so," Dinkelacker replied. "We couldn't have stopped more than a few minutes. Perhaps you should have put that bandage on sooner."

"Right you are," Pontoser agreed. "But it didn't feel like a sprain then. Nothing more than a little tickle down around the ankle."

"But we *did* fall behind." Dinkelacker tried to keep his voice free of reproach.

"Oh, yes, yes. No fool like an old fool. 'Physician, heal thyself' is not an altogether reliable admonition. Let's try to pick up. I'm all right, I tell you."

Dinkelacker glanced at his stridometer. "We're doing a hundred-and-twenty. Let's try for a hundred-and-sixty. Then, if that's comfortable, maybe we can increase it a bit more."

Both men picked up their gait. Dinkelacker paced them until the needle on the stridometer came waveringly around to 160. He let it creep up to a cushion of three more steps-per-minute before he said, "We're at about a hundred-and-sixty SPM. How do you feel?"

"Younger than my years." The doctor laughed, then added wryly, "As I had better damn well feel." But Dinkelacker saw that the speedup had caused Pontoser to limp. The doctor tried to hide the limp and Dinkelacker tried to ignore it.

To cover their common concern, they chit-chatted about various things—the weather, a matter of mounting interest, since the clouds had rolled away exposing the walkers to the sun's heat; the road's swirling dust, clogging their nostrils, filling their throats with gritty dryness when their mouths opened to breathe in needed air; the absolute requirement to conserve their water supply, one canteenful each; the persons missing from this year's walk.

"Montross. Was he at the line? Didn't see him," Dinkelacker remarked.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Off to Violet Plains. He came to see me about a week ago."

Dinkelacker guffawed. "The lounger's life, eh? Exchanging struggle for dignity." He hoped Pontoser caught the emphasis on that last word. But inwardly Dinkelacker's mind fought to shut out the memory of the multicolored pictures he had studied in the Violet Plains brochure. They showed plates of gourmet food; cool dripping steins of beer—it had been three years since he could even afford a beer; languid, poolside scenes; the company of composed, handsome, past-middle-aged folks like himself, these last partaking with serenity of a life they—he!—had never known. Eagerly, to drive out these visions, he turned and tilted his ear toward Pontoser who was talking again.

"I think I see them. The whorl of dust up ahead, that must be them. Damn this road! If they don't want to hardtop it, they could at least have dropped some cinders. Anything to keep this dust down."

"And fill up the potholes."

"Yes," Pontoser agreed, thinking of his ankle.

They were almost three hours out when they began to see men and women sitting by the sides of the road, some lying in the dust that covered the road shoulders up to the brick wall on each side. Most of the dropouts were beyond Dinkelacker's 52 years, but he was shocked to see a number who appeared younger. A few were older than Pontoser. All these people waved weakly to Dinkelacker and the doctor as the two passed; a few of them whispered hoarse encouragement through megaphoned hands.

"They're just up ahead."

"Keep going, fellas, you're doing fine."

"Give my regards to the Lee." Weaver's Lee, still some thirty-one miles distant, was the terminus of the walk.

Dinkelacker and Pontoser, seeing their fellow walkers at the roadsides, shouted back encouragement, but in doing so they slowed their pace and increased the flow of sweat from their bodies.

"C'mon, c'mon, get up and let's go!" they yelled.

"Let's go, let's go. It's easy. Just put one foot in front of the other."

And as their pace diminished, as they wasted precious energy shouting to the dropouts, the cloud of dust ahead became smaller, smaller.

"One-hundred-and-forty," Dinkelacker wailed, looking at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stridometer in alarm. "One-forty. We've *got* to pick it up."

"Can't. Just can't, Dink. Ankle's like a sack of knives."

"All life's a sack of knives. Let's pick it up. Pick it up!"

"How far have we come?"

Dinkelacker checked an adometer. "Ten miles. Only ten miles in over three hours. The Lee is thirty miles away."

Pontoser sighed and tried to quicken his pace. He placed both hands above the knee of the leg with the turned ankle. This had the effect of putting him in a semi-crouched position and increased his chances of stumbling again. Dinkelacker knew, too, that the doctor wouldn't be able to maintain the greater speed in that position.

Pontoser asked suddenly, "Did I see Quilter back there?"

"You sure did. Dropped out. He was avoiding us. Turned his eyes away, so I didn't say anything."

"Would like to have said something to old Crazy Quilt. Remember the year he left a trail of toilet paper behind him? No one ever figured out how he had sneaked it past the starting guards."

"Please, Doc, knock it off!"

"No joke, no one can compete forever. Aagh!"

"What's the matter? The ankle?"

Pontoser nodded. "Look, Dink, you know how long I've been at this thing. The walk. We've walked together a good many years. Remember who gave you pointers when you began? Well, I've done myself proud. Got that medal one year. There's no disgrace in dropping out. Not with my record."

"No. Let's go, let's go! Hop on one foot if you have to." Dinkelacker looked about for a stick of wood for a crutch, but there was none. The roadsides were always cleared before the walk. Besides, walking aids were against the rules. Theoretically, it was against the rules even to help a companion along; but everyone, including the officials, winked at that regulation. "Here, throw your arm around me. Take the weight off that foot."

Instead of doing as Dinkelacker suggested, Pontoser said, "Look at the stridometer."

Dinkelacker did so. "My God, we're back to one-hundred-and-twenty. No, one-eighteen now!"

"See. I'm slowing down. Holding you back." As he said this, the doctor pulled away and fell, in a little puff of dust, onto the road shoulder. There were more dropouts here than there had been farther back.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dinkelacker unscrewed his canteen. "Here, take a swig. You'll feel better. Then we'll be off again."

Pontoser pushed the proffered drink away. "I've got my own. I'm not going to win any prize this year. Age has caught up with me. And this damn ankle." He bent down, loosened the bandage, and threw the frogs heedlessly behind him.

Dinkelacker knew Pontoser meant not to go on, but he asked, "So you're going to stay here?"

"Yes."

"Wish I had something for the pain."

"The relief squad will have the pain killer. They'll be along soon enough. Get moving, Dink."

"See you, Doc."

" 'Bye, Dink."

They didn't shake hands.

Dinkelacker moved off toward the elusive cloud of dust up front. He pushed his SPM up to 160, and through careful breathing and by shutting everything, including Pontoser, out of his mind, he gradually increased his pace to 165. Yet the cloud of dust seemed to grow smaller and smaller. This disheartened him because he thought the main group was getting farther and farther ahead of him.

Then he realized that wasn't so. The wake of dust was getting smaller because there were fewer and fewer walkers left in the group. More and more of them were straggling and even more dropping out, lining the roadsides. Some had fallen on the road itself, too exhausted to drag themselves off onto a shoulder.

Encouraged that the group wasn't as far ahead as he had thought, Dinkelacker actually picked up his pace a bit more. He had an upbeat feeling about his performance today. He'd be all right, he reassured himself. He'd finish. Just could be he'd get one of those medals. Or come close, anyway. The clump-clump of his feet were good sounds to his ears.

He seemed to hear other good sounds. They seemed like sharp, distant claps of thunder that reverberated against the scorched brown hills flanking the road. He thought of rain and how welcome the cool drops would be. His eyes went to the sky.

No clouds. No rain. There had been no thunder.

It was the relief squad he heard. Grim, businesslike, unfledged youths with their final solution. They had come upon the first dropouts some miles back.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

Each year, the Mystery Writers of America conducts an event of overwhelming importance to everyone interested in detective fiction—the bestowing of its top prizes to the authors of the best books of the year.

In case you missed the awards ceremonies at the Biltmore Hotel in New York, or if you failed to see the results, here are the winners of the Edgar Allan Poe Awards for the outstanding books of 1976:

BEST NOVEL: *Promised Land* (Houghton-Mifflin) by Robert Parker, one of the best "hard-boiled" writers active today.

BEST FIRST NOVEL: *The Thomas Berryman Number* (Little, Brown) by James Patterson, and this won't be his last.

BEST SHORT STORY: "Like a Terrible Scream" *(Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine)* by Etta Revesz.

BEST CRITICAL/BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY: *Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection* (McGraw-Hill) by Chris Steinbrunner, Otto Penzler, Marvin Lachman, Charles Shibuk, and we blush.

BEST JUVENILE NOVEL: *Are You in the House Alone?* (Viking) by Richard Peck, who came close to winning two years ago for another book.

BEST MOTION PICTURE: *Family Plot* (Universal), screenplay by Ernest Lehman.

BEST PAPERBACK: *Confess Fletch* (Avon) by Gregory Mcdonald, which might be ever better than his first book *Fletch.*

BEST TV DRAMA (SERIES): "Requiem for Murder" on *The Streets of San Francisco* (ABC Television) by James J Sweeney.

BEST TV DRAMA (SINGLE TELE PLAY): *Helter-Skelter* (CBS Television) by J. P. Miller. The grisly reconstruction of the Charles Manson savagery.

BEST FACT CRIME: *Blood and Money* (Doubleday) by Thomas Thompson, the long-time best-seller that is as compelling as fiction.

Ravens, which are the top non-writing awards, went to the artists for the best hardcover book jacke

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—*King and Joker* (Pantheon)—and paperback cover—*Doors* (Warner).

In addition, a special Edgar was awarded to Henry Slesar as the writer of *Edge of Night* (ABC Television), the longest-running mystery series on television (21 years).

Congratulations to all!

© *1977 by Otto Penzler.*

BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

"Call me Dexter. It's not my name but it'll do." That's the closest we get to the clouded identity of the grim secret agent numbered X-9, revived in a breathtakingly punchy Nostalgia Press volume edited by popular-culture historian Woody Gelman. The sinewy sleuth burst on the King Features scene in January of 1934, according to Woody "the gala wedding of pulp fiction to the comics medium," a landmark collaboration between one of the leading detective writers of the time, Dashiell Hammett, and the dazzling visuals of young artist Alexander Raymond, who simultaneously has just created a new science-fiction strip called *Flash Gordon.* The sparse dialogue, gut action, shifty criminals, and hard women cry out the Hammett style: the femme fatale shoots a minion and snarls, "Men. Putty!" It's a gray Depression world through which Secret Agent X-9 moves, hard-boiled and heat-seared, and it's good to have him back.

Bolder directions are being taken in other visual areas as well. National Periodicals are issuing an oversized special bookstore pictorial of Batman, the legendary crimefighter reworked by talented writer Denny O'Neil into a figure closer to his 1939 origins —"to reestablish Batman not only as the best detective in the world, but also a dark and frightening creature of the night." The nocturnal Batman is, as well, given an exotic villain and some surprisingly dramatic new adventures, as far removed from the puerile children's Batman of TV as pulp is from slick. Note also that *The Golden Age of Comic Books* (Ballantine) reproduces in four colors some of the more garish Detective and Crimebusters covers, with commentary, and Michael L. Fleisher's *Encyclopedia of Comic Book Heroes* (Collier Macmillan) has come out with its volume on *Wonder Woman,* cataloguing many fo her fifth columnist and racketeer villains.

Reminiscing over television's yesteryears has become popular recently. Max Wilk's *The Golden Age of Television* (Delacorte Press) says infuriatingly little about the great mystery shows of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the past, but Vincent Terrace's two-volume *Complete Encyclopedia of Television Programs 1947–1976* (A. S. Barnes) provides splendid if tantalizing capsule information on many a forgotten suspense show *(Orient Express, Mr. Black, The Edgar Wallace Mystery Theater),* rough-edged but perfect for browsing. Reaching further back in time, John Dunning's *Tune In Yesterday, The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio, 1925–1976* (Prentice-Hall) is both detailed and loving in its treatment of the great melodrama classics of the medium. Happily, he in no way slights mystery and suspense (his entry on the underrated *Escape* series is a gem), is definitive on the plot lines, characters, and openings of all the crime and detective shows, awesomely researching an all-but-vanished art and the best thing of its kind yet done.

Byron Preiss' awaited "fiction illustrated" novel, *Son of Sherlock Holmes,* Pyramid), sends the great detective's offspring, enigmatic Abraham Moth, on a rare-book chase through three countries, uncovering a 68-year-old mystery and a dark Moriarty-inspired legacy. Good graphics and a very likeable book.

© 1977 by Chris Steinbrunner.

INTERVIEW: ETTA REVESZ

Winning the Edgar Allan Poe Award of the Mystery Writers of America is the ultimate achievement for anyone who tries to produce something worthwhile in this difficult literary genre. To win the prize for best short story of the year with the first piece of work to be published is a special triumph, and that is exactly what Etta Revesz accomplished with "Like a Terrible Scream," published in the May 1976 issue of *EQMM.*

EQMM: The speech patterns and dialect in your story are so natural and convincing that I expected you to have a Spanish accent, but there isn't a trace of one. How do you account for that?

REVESZ: By the fact that I'm Hungarian. The name is pronounced "*Ray*-vays."

EQMM: Is this excellent story really your first, or are there others that you don't talk about?

REVESZ: I've written a lot of stories, but I've never sent any others out. You see, I only type with two fingers, and it's too much work to retype something properly. I can write 10,000 words more easily than I can retype 2,000. So I just keep writing.

EQMM: Why did you finally submit this story?

REVESZ: It's the first and only story that I ever sent out. My agent submitted it to *EQMM,* which surprised me. I didn't really think of it as a mystery or detective story. I originally wrote it as a treatment

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for a television show.

EQMM: Do your other stories have elements of crime and mystery? Can readers of *EQMM* expect to see another story from you?

REVESZ: I don't know. I think I have an investigative mind and my novel, *P/Q*, which will be published in the fall, has a great deal of crime in it. But I don't tend to write the conventional type of mystery story.

EQMM: Your first story certainly wasn't conventional, and *EQMM* published it; EQMM doesn't publish only conventional mystery stories.

REVESZ: I'd be delighted to have more published, but I have to retype them, which I hate. I don't rewrite, but I do have to retype.

EQMM: You don't rewrite? At all? Do you mean that your Edgar-winning story was a first draft?

REVESZ: Yes. I may have changed two words, maybe three, but that's all. I know what I want to say and where I want to end up. What happens between that, I don't know. It seems like I become the people I write about, and they just dictate to me. I'm just the instrument through which they speak.

THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

Though theaters have long been a favorite locale for fictional murder, actor-detectives have been relatively few. Glyn Carr's mountain-climbing Sir Abercrombie Lewker, Carolyn Wells' retired movie idol Kenneth Carlisle, and Barnaby Ross' (Ellery Queen's) incomparable Drury Lane are three that come to mind.

At least two current series in the classic tradition feature thespian-sleuths. Simon Brett's *So Much Blood* (Scribners, $6.95) finds middle-aged actor Charles Paris presenting his one-man show on Thomas Hood on the fringes of the Edinburgh Festival while looking into the murder of another actor. The careful plotting, witty narration, and pointed satire of the British theatrical scene are up to the high standard set in Brett's first mystery, and the character of Paris grows in sympathy and complexity. (****)

Anne Morice's Tessa Crichton is the actress-wife of a Scotland Yard detective, but he is offstage in *Murder in Mimicry* (St. Martin's, $7.95). Tessa is in Washington D.C. for a pre-Broadway engagement of the latest British hit when the inevitable murder strikes the company. A solid conventional whodunit, soundly constructed and colorfully cast. (***)

The more customary outsider's viewpoint of actors and their foibles appears in H. R. F. Keat-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing's *Filmi, Filmi, Inspector Ghote* (Doubleday Crime Club, $5.95). Murder comes to "Bollywood," the Indian film colony, as the star of a new version of Macbeth is killed by a fallen light, and Ghote (who must someday be played by Peter Sellers) finds the killer in his usual stumbling but determined manner. (***)

**** Bartholomew Gill: *McGarr and the Politician's Wife,* Scribners, $6.95. The first case for Dublin Police Inspector Peter McGarr is a distinguished crime novel, rich in insights into the Irish and their ambivalent attitudes about violence, terrorism, and the I.R.A. The combination of social observation and neat plotting recalls the South African novels of James McClure.

*** Owen Sela: *An Exchange of Eagles,* Pantheon, $8.95. This well researched, action-filled assassination thriller takes place in 1940. Hitler and F.D.R., the eagles of the title, are both potential targets, and such figures as J. Edgar Hoover, Herman Goering, and Meyer Lansky are among the characters. A painstakingly constructed epic, but Sela's smaller-canvas contemporary espionage novels are better entertainment.

*** Dick Francis: *In the Frame,* Harper and Row, $8.95. Horse artist Charles Todd is the amateur sleuth in the latest from an utterly reliable craftsman. Though the book is most notable for its observations on Australia and its people and on the world of art and artists, racing has not been neglected. Some of the action takes place in Melbourne on Cup Day. Good solid Francis, not quite top grade.

*** Elizabeth Peters: *Devil-May-Care,* Dodd Mead, $7.95. The main question in Peters' latest Gothic is a very conventional one: Are the ghosts appearing to heroine Ellie in her eccentric Aunt Kate's old house real or manufactured to frighten her? The author's humor and the frequent references to the Washington Redskins and Sonny Jurgenson are less commonplace "romantic suspense" elements. (For an even funnier Peters specialty, seek out *Crocodile on the Sandbank.*)

Three of the books at hand will be eligible for the Mystery Writers of America Edgar for best American first mystery of 1977. Jon A. Jackson's *The Diehard* (Random House, $6.95) is a compellingly written police procedural with a comparatively fresh locale (Detroit) and a special feeling of reality, especially in its farmhouse finale. (***) Washington *Post* reporter Lawrence Meyer's *A Capitol Crime* (Viking, $7.95) views the D.C. political and journalistic scene with a knowing eye and introduces a likeable reporter-detective in Tony Jordan, who, though post-Watergate, is not so different from his sleuthing ancestors in wisecracking, surface cynicism, and editor-battling. (***) Playwright Bob Randall's *The Fan* (Random House, $7.95) tells the story of a Broadway musical star terrorized by a psy-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chopathic fan. The narrative format (all letters between the characters) is sometimes awkward and ultimately unsatisfactory, but the book is readable and often suspenseful. (**)

Finally, several favorite series characters in their latest adventures: Bill Pronzini's unnamed, pulp-magazine-collecting private eye returns in *Blowback* (Random House, $6.95), investigating a mystery in a Northern California fishing camp while awaiting test results on a lesion on his lung. A fine job, combining the action and cerebral aspects of the detective story. (***) A party seeking monsters in a Scottish loch figures in Gladys Mitchell's *Winking at the Brim* (McKay-Washburn, $6.95), second novel in the U.S. revival of Dame Beatrice Bradley's cases. Though there is fun along the way, a rather limp and perfunctory summing up makes it less impressive than *Watson's Choice.* (**) Footsore veteran Inspector Schmidt is also below top form in George Bagby's (Aaron Marc Stein's) *Innocent Bystander* (Doubleday Crime Club, $5.95) (**). And British TV favorite Barlow makes an ill-advised New York visit in Elwyn Jones' *Barlow Exposed* (St. Martin's, $7.95), a novel so short as to make the average Maigret look like *War and Peace.* (**)

Apologies to Lawrence Block, whose pseudonym for his Nero Wolfe pastiches is Chip Harrison, not Chip Hamilton, as stated in the May Jury Box.

© 1977 by Jon L. Breen.

REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

RAVEN AND THE KAMIKAZE, by Donald MacKenzie. Houghton Mifflin Company, $7.95.

In a race with the clock ex-Scotland Yard Detective-Inspector John Raven teams with hostile Barbara Beattie and the roguish Casimir Zaleski in preventing Zaleski's fellow Pole, Lamprecht, from passing along critical material to the KGB. Or so it appears. Selection of the Detective Book Club. This is MacKenzie's 23rd novel of suspense and the fourth to feature Raven. Ben Healey *(The Vespucci Papers)* said about MacKenzie's *Raven and the Ratcatcher,* "Once you are hooked with Raven, the cool sophisticated ex-Scotland Yard cop, you are with him to the end . . . A very good read with a refreshingly different detective."

THE ETRUSCAN SMILE, by Velda Johnston. Dodd, Mead, $7.95.

The lovely Tuscan countryside around Florence is the setting for the latest novel of romantic suspense by Velda Johnston, author of *Deveron Hall* and *The Frenchman.* It was in search of her sister, Althea, that Samantha came to Italy and took up residence in the old farmhouse Althea had been renting. It soon became obvious that someone was trying to scare her away, but Samantha was determined to remain and continue her search—a search which led her into a web of passion, murder, and long-hidden evil.

"Very ingenious plotting . . . she combines all the ingredients necessary for success in this kind of genre writing."—*Publishers Weekly*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

S.O.S.

Dear Reader:
We would value your opinion on several questions. Would you write us any thoughts you have regarding the following?

What length of story do you prefer?
What kind of story do you prefer?
Which authors do you prefer?
Have you used our book-ordering service?
Would you like to see EQ's Mystery Newsletter continued, or would you prefer to see an additional story in its place?
Do you object to an occasional reprint in EQMM, or do you prefer to see all original stories?
Do you like our Department of First Stories?
Have you ever submitted a story to EQMM?

Joel Davis
Publisher

Send to: E. Sullivan
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine
229 Park Avenue South
New York, N.Y. 10003

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	DISCOUNTED PRICE
Bagby, George	INNOCENT BYSTANDER	Doubleday Crime Club	$5.95	$4.75
Brett, Simon	SO MUCH BLOOD	Scribners	6.95	5.50
Dolson, Hildegarde	BEAUTY SLEEP	Lippincott	7.95	6.35
Francis, Dick	IN THE FRAME	Harper & Row	8.95	6.95
Gill, Bartholomew	McGARR AND THE POLITICIAN'S WIFE	Scribners	6.95	5.50
Jackson, Jon A.	THE DIEHARD	Random House	6.95	5.50
Johnston, Velda	THE ETRUSCAN SMILE	Dodd, Mead	7.95	6.35
Keating, H. R. F.	FILMI, FILMI, INSPECTOR GHOTE	Doubleday Crime Club	5.95	4.75
Kiefer, Warren	THE KIDNAPPERS	Harper & Row	8.95	6.95
MacKenzie, Donald	RAVEN AND THE KAMIKAZE	Houghton, Mifflin	7.95	6.35
Meyer, Lawrence	A CAPITOL CRIME	Viking	7.95	6.35
Mitchell, Gladys	WINKING AT THE BRIM	McKay-Washburn	6.95	5.50
Morice, Anne	MURDER IN MIMICRY	St. Martin's	7.95	6.35
Parker, Robert	PROMISED LAND	Houghton, Mifflin	7.95	6.35
Patterson, James	THE THOMAS BERRYMAN NUMBER	Little, Brown	7.95	6.35
Peters, Elizabeth	DEVIL MAY CARE	Dodd, Mead	7.95	6.35
Pronzini, Bill	BLOWBACK	Random House	6.95	5.50
Randall, Bob	THE FAN	Random House	7.95	6.35
Sela, Owen	AN EXCHANGE OF EAGLES	Pantheon	8.95	6.95
Stout, Rex	JUSTICE ENDS AT HOME AND OTHER STORIES	Viking	8.95	6.95
Warner, Mignon	A MEDIUM FOR MURDER	McKay-Washburn	7.95	6.35
Zaroulis, Nancy L.	THE POE PAPERS	Putnam	7.95	6.35

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EQMM BOOK DISCOUNT DEPARTMENT

The titles which we are offering this month are listed on the previous page. These books are regular publishers' editions, the very same as those available in bookstores. Only those books which appear can be ordered; we are not in a position to order other books so please do not include any others on the Order Form.

HOW TO ORDER:

1. Fill in the quantities you wish to order of each title.
2. Fill in the "Discount Price" column by multiplying the quantity of each title ordered by the "Discount Price."
3. Add these totals and fill in the sub-total.
4. Fill in the shipping and handling charges by multiplying the total number of books ordered by 60¢ per book.
5. Fill in sales tax if applicable.
6. Fill in the "Grand Total" of your order.

SHIPPING:

1. All orders will be shipped within 24 hours after they are received.
2. Out of stock titles will be shipped within 30 days.
3. All orders not completed in 30 days will be cancelled and money will be refunded.

PAYMENT:

1. Please enclose a check or money order with your order.

For Office Use Only

Check _____

M.O. _____

Other _____

Issue _____

SEND ORDER TO:
BOOK SERVICE
EQMM BOOK DEPT.
P.O. BOX 166
COS COB, CT 06807

ORDER FORM Please send me the following books:

Quantity	Title	Discount Price

SHIPPING AND HANDLING CHARGE
Add 60¢ per book
Connecticut residents add 7% sales tax

SUB-TOTAL	
POSTAGE & HANDLING Books at	
SALES TAX If Applicable	
GRAND TOTAL	

SHIP TO:

Your Name _____

Address _____

City/State _____ **Zip** _____

Enclosed is my check or money order for $ _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

ANN MACKENZIE

Ann Mackenzie's "Night of the Scarecrows," in the April 1976 issue of EQMM, was a strange and compelling story about the power of evil, the powers of darkness. Her new story is even stranger and more compelling . . .

MY FATHER KNOWS YOUR NAME

by ANN MACKENZIE

October 15th Today the postman rode past our gate again. His bicycle wheels crunched on the drifts of dead leaves in the lane. I watched from the window, wishing he'd stop and put something in our box, but he didn't. It must be all of three months since he did.

Perhaps the next time he stops will be on my birthday. There may be a present from darling Isabella. There'll certainly be a present from my father. I've never seen my father—I don't even know who he is—but he always remembers October 31st.

"Don't worry. You'll find out all you need to know when the time is right," my mother said last night, when I asked about him. She was sitting at the old oak table, near the lamp, dealing out cards. The cards mother plays with aren't the ordinary kind; they are the different, much older ones she calls the Tarot pack. She turned up the Tower, the King of Swords, and the Hanged Man and gazed at them in silence, her heavy white eyelids hiding the look in her eyes.

It's strange, about mother. In the morning she rolls up her hair and goes to work in the old gray jersey dress that's too tight now and shows how fat she's grown, and she just looks nothing. But at night when her braids hang thick and shining in the lamplight and she's wearing the long, glimmering, crimson dressing gown

© *1977 by Ann Mackenzie.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that hides her bulk, she looks quite different. Then you see how smooth and white her skin is, how rich and red her mouth.

I was lying on the dusty hearthrug by the fire, my back to its glow. I was tickling Jezebel gently under her chin, and she was purring drowsily, half asleep. I was thinking of my father.

I said, "Tell me one thing, mother. Is he rich and famous?"

She smiled to herself—that secret, hidden smile. "Oh, he's rich all right. There isn't a doubt of that. And as for famous—there's hardly a soul on earth doesn't know his name."

That was all she'd say. But she's never said so much about him before. It makes me wonder . . . He must be an understanding person. Sensitive. Or he wouldn't send me such beautiful presents each year—things I never even dream I want until they come.

One year he sent me Jezebel in a basket. She was only a tiny kitten then, a black ball of fur.

"But she's special," my mother said, "make no mistake. Look after her, and she'll soon be following you round with her tail in the air, just like a little dog."

This was quite true. Jezebel is no ordinary cat. There's a deep understanding between us, as though we can read the thoughts in each other's minds.

Five years ago father sent me a golden-haired doll with two dozen silk dresses, but the doll had no face. At first I was disappointed, and I cried, but after a while I grew to love her more than my other doll, with her sparkling blue eyes, her fixed, too-friendly smile.

"Your father will be pleased about that," my mother said.

Last year he sent me a tiny human skull, so white and delicate it almost makes me cry. I hold it in my hands, and stare deep, deep into the empty holes of its eyes, and I feel after a while that I nearly have the answer to a question I'm only slowly learning to ask.

Isabella's birthday presents are different. She gives me manicure sets and strings of beads and sweaters, things that ordinary girls with ordinary parents get for their birthdays in ordinary homes. And before she was married she used to send me letters—scribbly, friendly letters full of news, always ending up, *Take care of yourself, my pet.*

I love Isabella, and so does mother. They were childhood friends, and mother once said to me, "She is everything good in my life."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Isn't it weird—mother and I, both loving Isabella and no one else . . .

I wonder if she'll send me a present this year.

October 20th I wish Isabella was coming to stay for my birthday. She always used to, before she married Roger. She'd drive down to the cottage in her little car and run in through the back door, laughing and calling to us, holding out her arms. And from that moment everything would change.

The cottage is always cold, even in midsummer. It's very old, and mother says the ground is damp, being so near the lake, and overshadowed by huge and ancient trees. But when Isabella comes the cottage seems warm and dry; bright squares of sunshine pour through the dusty panes into the room—I never notice them unless she's here. The fires burn more brightly, banishing the evening chill, and she fills stone jars with gold and crimson leaves and stands them on the dresser and the shelves so that the cottage glows and crackles with color instead of being a gray, rather cobwebby place where nothing's ever properly clean or dry, and there's a musty smell like old decaying leaves.

Isabella used to argue with mother about the way I've been brought up.

"It's ridiculous," she used to tell her fiercely, her hands all floury from making apple pie crust, or busy with her needle and pins as she patched my jeans, or rubbing up the old brass candlesticks till they shone in the firelight with a rich deep gleam. "It's ridiculous that Jane should be so lonely. She never sees another girl her age, she never sees a man of any age—"

"Except the postman," I interrupted once.

"There you are," Isabella said to mother. "That's what I mean. She ought to be learning to type, or doing a job, or keeping house efficiently at least. She's growing up to be a shocking little slattern, with no idea how anything should be done. She spends half of her time with her nose stuck in some old book, and the other half wandering in the woods with her cat, and she's hardly been away from here in her life. She needs a wider, more varied experience of—"

"It's the way her father wants it," my mother said, in an emphatic yet expressionless way that prevented Isabella from saying any more.

Isabella looked uncomfortable and puzzled, as she always does

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when mother mentions my father, and dropped the subject for a while, as I knew she would.

I don't think I miss being friends with other girls, or having dates, or doing any of the things that most girls do when they're just ten days off turning 17. But I do miss Isabella dreadfully.

She was married to Roger 18 months ago. She wrote about him in a letter to mother and me. She said she'd never been happier in her life, because Roger was so strong and handsome and rich, and the only thing that made her a little bit sad was that she wouldn't be able to see so much of us, but she'd do her best to come down whenever she could, and of course she'd write often.

Mother still has the letter in the old bureau. I read it over and over, because it's all there is left of Isabella now. We never hear from her properly any more, but we have shiny postcards from all over the world—London and Tokyo, Sydney and Singapore. All the places look tidy and have bright blue skies and *Lots of love; hope you're both well* on the back. But it isn't the same.

Last year she forgot to send me a birthday present. I wonder if she'll forget again this year?

October 25th "At least we know she's happy," I said this evening. Mother and I were drinking lukewarm soup by the fire, which was smoky and sullen. I'd used damp wood to build it. The room was filled with a chilly, lingering twilight fast fading into dark. Neither of us had bothered to light the lamps.

"You mean Isabella, I suppose?" said mother.

"Yes. Isabella." Even her name brought warmth and comfort with it, like dry kindling and lamplight, or red curtains pulled over to keep out the dusty night.

"You mean you know she's happy," said mother. "Or think you know."

A cold beginning of doubt clutched at me and held. "Don't you think she's happy? Don't you, mother?"

"I wouldn't be surprised if she wasn't," said mother briefly. "I've had a feeling about it almost from the first. Besides, there's the cards. You have to take them into account as well."

"What do the cards say?" I whispered, half afraid.

"They tell of grief and sorrow, but they don't make their meaning plain." Mother carried the empty soup bowls to the sink, and I knew she'd said all she was going to say.

Perhaps mother's wrong. But she's never wrong when she tells

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what the cards have said. Sometimes I wonder if it's really the cards that tell her, or if she has some other way of knowing . . .

Oh, Isabella, dearest Isabella—if you're unhappy, you needn't send me a present. But do, please, try to send me a card instead.

October 27th Today the postman did stop at our gate. I wish he hadn't. He brought what I hoped would be a birthday card. It was postmarked in town and addressed to me in Isabella's scribbly writing. When I opened it my hands were trembling with excitement.

It wasn't a birthday card, it was a letter. A terrible letter about her marriage to Roger.

Mother was right. He isn't kind at all; he's perverted and cruel, and Isabella discovered it soon after she married him. All these months she's been too proud to write about the dreadful suffering she has endured, and then suddenly she couldn't bear it any more and it all burst out in a sad wild torrent of tears and self-reproaches and regrets. Poor Isabella. Poor, poor Isabella.

She writes: *He'll never let me go. His pleasure lies in torturing me in little subtle ways, in seeing me humiliated and scorned. I'm the butterfly whose wings he tears to shreds . . .*

I can't bear to think of my darling Isabella so hurt, so changed. Something beautiful and strong and calm has gone out of my life, now that I know she's not happy any more.

I'm sure she won't send me a birthday present now.

October 31st My 17th birthday. There was nothing from Isabella in the post, but the birthday present from my father came.

"I may as well tell you right away," said mother, "that I don't approve of it. You're much too young. He should have waited till you were more mature."

She held out the pendant on its thin silver chain. It looked like a sort of ancient hieroglyph, not at all pretty. I was disappointed.

"I don't see why I'm too young for that," I said.

"You don't understand what it is yet," snapped my mother. "It's a death wish, and a very lucky girl you are to have it."

"A death wish?" I said. "What's a death wish?" I half thought she was joking, but mother never jokes.

"Look at me," said my mother in her slow deep voice, "and wish me dead."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I stared at her, and saw her shadowy gaze slide away from mine. She moved restlessly in her chair. "You have his eyes," she muttered. Still looking away from me, into the corner of the room, she went on, "Say clearly, 'My father knows your name'."

I echoed obediently, "My father knows your name."

The words seemed to leave my lips and scurry about like furry animals, little mice, perhaps. Jezebel, crouched down between my feet, lashing her tail, made a strange, hoarse, crying sound.

"If you'd been wearing the pendant then," said mother, "I'd be sitting here as dead as mutton now." She looked at me again—a deep, antagonistic, envious glance. "Well, how does it feel to be able to kill with a look?"

"I don't know," I said. I didn't. I couldn't think.

"Mind you, it's only a one-shot thing," said mother. "Use it once and it's finished forever. Don't waste it, Jane. He may never give you another, remember that."

I wondered what Isabella would say about it. Laugh, probably, and lift her face to the sun. "Morbid fancies, morbid fancies, Jane. Your mother always had them, even as a girl. Her head was stuffed full of black magic and witches and spells—nasty things, really, especially on a beautiful day like this."

Thinking of Isabella made me remember the letter we'd had from her the other day. *He'll never let me go. His pleasure lies in torturing me in little subtle ways . . .*

And now it was within my power to set her free.

It's like a window in a darkened room opening suddenly on the sunset so that light pours in. It's right, it must be right, that Isabella—whom I love so much, who has done so much for me—should have benefit from my father's gift.

I said, "Mother, listen. I'm going to town to stay with Isabella. I'll only be away a day or two."

Yesterday, before I was 17 and had father's present, the thought of going away from the cottage and the woods would have filled me with a sick fear. But now I have a curious feeling of calm, as though dark protecting hands hover over me. It came to me when I took the pendant from mother and clasped it round my neck. I know I have no reason to be afraid, and that whatever happens I shall come to no harm.

I think my mother sensed something of what had happened to me. She sat there thoughtfully, slowly nodding her head, while Jezebel wound herself round my ankles and purred.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"In that case," said mother, "you'd better leave tomorrow."

I feel quite excited. I never guessed my birthday would end like that.

November 1st I'm actually in town—in Isabella's apartment on the thirteenth floor. I came up in an elevator—it must be ten years since I rode in an elevator. Or traveled by bus. Or heard the sounds of the city, smelled its pungent smells, saw the crowds of people hurrying along its sidewalks, the teeming traffic crawling through its streets.

Isabella couldn't believe it was really me. She hugged me tightly, laughing and crying at once, calling me her darling, her precious child. She looks so different now from the way she did at the cottage, in her jeans and checked shirt. She wore a beautiful clinging dress with a diamond clip that cut my cheek when she caught me in her arms. Before she was married she never had things like that.

She is much thinner than she used to be. Her eyes are feverishly bright and her hair is lovely. She says a man from the first-floor salon comes up to do it.

She's lent me a dress, as my blouse and skirt are so shabby. It's pale and silvery like the dress in the fairy tale that was as shining as the stars and so silky and fine it packed away into a walnut shell. Roger bought it for her. It cost hundreds and hundreds of dollars. She said she wouldn't care if I cut it to pieces.

Then she lay back in a huge squashy white armchair—her apartment is all white and black and glassy, like a world of snow and ebony and ice—and she cried until I thought she was going to be ill. She said how much happier she'd been when she was poor, and how afraid she was of Roger's power over her, and how she'd tried and tried to leave him but she couldn't.

"I shall never get away from him," she kept sobbing.

I told her not to worry, everything would be all right, and she stroked my hand and said in a voice so low I could hardly hear it at all: "Dear little Jane, I'm afraid you don't understand."

There's a little bathroom opening off my room. The handles on the taps are shaped like golden fish.

I haven't seen Roger yet. He'll be back tomorrow.

November 2nd Roger came back this morning. Isabella said in a soft little frightened voice, "This is Jane, who came in unex-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pectedly yesterday." He didn't look at her or answer her. He looked at me. I didn't move or speak.

"Ah, yes," he said, in his slightly accented voice. "Our guest."

He took my hand to his lips and kissed it. My hand is rough and brown, with two deep scabby scratches on the back where Jezebel clawed it the other day. My fingernails are bitten down to the quick. I wanted to snatch it away and hide it behind my back, horribly ashamed, like a child caught with stolen candy in its fist.

Roger . . . I never saw anyone more vital, more alive, more completely absorbed in using power. He generates a kind of electric tension that shocks you with its force when he enters the room.

He treats Isabella with indifference and contempt, as you might treat a household pet you didn't love. I can see her tremble when he touches her. Poor Isabella—oh, I pity her. And yet he is never unaware of her. A part of him is always conscious of her, of what she is saying and doing and where she is.

There's gypsy blood in Roger somewhere, I think. He has those deep cold eyes and a curving, cruel mouth. It's strange to think of all the vitality, all the fire in him being put out forever by my father's gift.

I wonder when I'll feel strong enough to use it . . .

November 3rd It's done! It's done! I feel giddy, drunk with triumph. I did it today. I did it because he kissed me.

What happened? I must write it down exactly, so I never forget a single detail as long as I live. Isabella wasn't there. She was in the bedroom. He was over by the fireplace, fixing a drink. I was standing by the window looking out at the sky. Over the river was a small inflamed-looking sunset, like a sore throat.

I was gently stroking Isabella's white velvet drapes. They fall soft and white as snowdrifts onto the carpet and lie there in heaps of heavy sculptured folds.

He came up behind me and turned me towards him and kissed me. It was a long deep kiss. My first in 17 years—my first in all my life . . .

I heard a light gasp and a little cry, and jerked myself away, out of his arms. Isabella was standing by the open door that led to the bedroom. Her hair was loose, her eyes were wide and brilliant, and her thin white hand was pressed hard against her mouth. She seemed to be shivering, not from shock, but from a curious kind of pleasure.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Roger picked up his glass and went to her. "My dear," he said, "can't you see that three's a crowd? Will you come back when your friend and I have finished?"

He hadn't kissed me for my sake—I knew that then. It had simply been another way of hurting Isabella. He stood smiling at her while she stared up at him, helpless, her pleading hands held out to him. Neither moved at all, and as they gazed entranced into each other's eyes I began to realize what I hadn't realized before—the full strength of the bond that held them to each other. She needed to be hurt and humbled by him, he needed to wound and humiliate her, and in this each found an appalling kind of joy.

Well—the time had come to set the prisoner free. I felt my father's presence in the room. The warm and scented air was quivering with the unseen presence of dark wings. I knew I could do it—I knew I was his daughter.

I said it slowly and clearly: "My father knows your name."

The words had an unimaginable deep strength. They left me limp and shaking as they flowed from my lips. Then they met and mingled, blended and converged in a single irresistible point of power, lethal as a dagger, swift as thought. Soundless, invisible, they found their mark. The pendant burned red-hot against my breast and Isabella lay crumpled on the carpet, white and still.

I stroke his hair, and smile. "You're free now, Roger. Free to take me as your love, your bride . . ."

I shall have diamond clips, and dresses shining like the stars, and a man to come up from the salon to do my hair, and handles on my taps shaped like golden fish.

And I shall have Roger . . .

I needn't say, "There'll be no funny business, like with Isabella. This time around, I'm going to be the boss." I don't have to. He understands the terms quite well.

He keeps asking me and asking me how I did it. His brown skin has a sick and greenish cast, and his hands are trembling. I tell him I did it with the death wish my father gave me.

He looks at me. He whispers, "Who is your father?"

I know for sure now who my father is, but I'm not going to tell him. And as for the death wish Roger fears so much—well, father gave me only one and it's used up now. But that's something else I won't tell Roger.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

THOMAS WALSH

It was a perfect plan—absolutely foolproof. Nothing could go wrong. No possibility of a hitch. And at the end of the rainbow there was a suitcase with $300,000 in hard cash . . . a Thomas Walsh special, with a dash of Damon Runyon—meet Punch Coughlin, Paw Paw McGovern, and Pal Hennessey, the wild man from K.C., in a New York kidnaping caper . . .

MR. BOUNTIFUL

by THOMAS WALSH

Punch Coughlin made his phone call from a subway pay booth on the Lexington Avenue line. He scattered a handful of change on the small ledge under the phone, then got a number out in K.C., his old hangout, which he did not have to get from Information. All his really important numbers Punch kept in his head; no possible involvement then, whatever happened.

"So how are you?" he began, when the connection was put through. "How's the arthritis, kid? You know who this is, don't you?"

Which was another mannerism Punch had on the phone—no names ever mentioned.

"Yeah, sure," Joe Mars said. "Long time no see. Where you been, pal?"

"Here and there," Punch said, who never liked to give his exact location either, not even to Joe Mars. "Ought to come down here to Florida maybe. Helps arthritis a lot, they tell me."

"Yeah, only wished I could," Joe Mars said. "Seems to get worse and worse all the time. Anything special you want?"

Punch, with his narrow leathery face and shriveled-up little jockey's body, glanced out at a Bronx express that roared by.

© *1977 by Thomas Walsh.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, I don't know," he said; now for the haggling. "Friend of mine could use a good reliable boy for something special up in New York tonight. Got anybody?"

"Hah?" Joe said, thinking it over quick as a flash. How important might this be for someone like Punch Coughlin to call him? "All depends, pal. Maybe yes, maybe no. What's it worth?"

"Just an errand," Punch said. "In and out. Half an hour, that's all. My friend would go for a couple of bills, he tells me."

"A couple of bills?" Joe said, and chuckled coarsely. "And all the way from K.C. to New York? Some errand, pal."

"Well, expenses, sure," Punch said. "Thought that was understood. You're dealing with responsible people, remember. Two bills and his ticket money the minute he steps off the plane in New York tonight."

"Might be able to get you the wild man for seven and a half," Joe went on, apparently not having heard the repeated offer. "If he happened to be in the mood, of course. But you never can tell about him, Punch—A Number One, naturally, for whatever the hell you want him to do, but not for peanuts."

So the name Punch had been uttered, and Punch did not like that. He showed a thin line of teeth to the booth door.

"Thought you knew who this was," he said. "Thought you recognized my voice. Eddie Uncher."

"Oh, yeah," Joe Mars said. "Oh, sure, Eddie. So how about the wild man then, and seven and a half? Okay?"

"Kind of doubt it," Punch said. "Have to see." But no more than five thousand, he had already decided, and maybe only four and a half if he played his cards right. No sense giving Joe any ideas. "I'll have to talk it over with my friend and see what he thinks. Call you back in about ten minutes."

But it was almost an hour, by which time Joe should have began sweating a little, when Punch called him again from another pay booth in Queensboro Plaza.

"No, like I said," he announced then. "Just an errand, that's all. My friend says he might go for three, maybe, but that's absolute tops."

"Ah, what the hell," Joe said. "Might as well use up the time, kid. The wild man is something special, you understand—all the guts in the world. Never met up with him, did you? But three bills wouldn't be even tip money for Pal Hennessey. Least I could even suggest would be five."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

So down to five now, and Punch grinned crookedly around the cigarette in his mouth. Better than he had thought. Play it cosy here and he ought to get the wild man, whoever the hell he was, for three and a half.

"Wait a minute," he said. "Have to talk to my friend again. Hold on, kid."

He put down the phone, lit another cigarette, and whistled *Night and Day* too low for the phone to catch it.

"Sorry," he resumed then. "The man says three and a half, and that's all. Looks like I'll have to try somebody else, kid. Take care of that arthritis, will you?"

"Only I knew how," Joe complained. "Hardly can get around any more. You got no idea. How about four five o o, then?"

So Punch had him. It was done.

"Me," he said, and with the most convincing regret in his tone, "I'd tell you yes in a second. You know that, kid. But what my friend guarantees is that you wouldn't be stepping on anybody's toes up in New York, and that all your wild man would have to do is run this simple errand for him, and make sure that nothing goes wrong. Simple as that. So the most he'll go for is three five o o."

"Hell, I'm not sure," Joe said. "Have to talk to the wild man. One thing, though—if he says yes. Have the money right there ready for him when he gets off the plane. You don't, and he's liable to blow the guts out of everybody around. He's still sore about last time. Half before, they tell him, and half after. Only there ain't no after. Only he never sees them again. Don't fool around with the wild man, Punch. Rub him the wrong way and he can be the toughest guy you ever saw in your life. Just telling you."

So Punch's name again—and that time Punch almost hung up. The old man must be getting senile! But where else could he get a tough and reliable boy, and on short notice, who wouldn't know Punch Coughlin even if he saw him, and who ought to be in and out of New York before he had any idea of how he'd been used, and for what? He managed to contain himself. They murmured a while longer, completing the arrangements, then Punch took a subway train out to Astoria.

But everything was fine there, in the house; no sweat.

"She acting all right?" Punch asked Paw Paw McGovern. Paw Paw was a burly, bullet-headed man, with enormous hairy hands;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hence the name. "Nice and quiet down there?"

"Won't eat anything," Paw Paw said. "Just lies there bawling like a kid under her blindfold. You think the husband got that letter we made her write?"

"First thing this morning," Punch assured him. "Special Delivery. And Joe Mars is sending us somebody named Pal Hennessey, a real wild man. So we're just about set, Paw Paw. You leave a briefcase for him at Kennedy Airport—he's coming in on the six o'clock plane from K.C.—and we put inside thirty-five hundred bucks and his note of instructions. And what I mean is exactly thirty-five hundred *too*. Don't get smart with this fellow. Joe tells me he's liable to take the whole waiting room apart if there's so much as a dime missing. Somebody clipped him last time and he didn't like that. Kind of a psycho, the way I get it."

And that was the way they handled it. After Paw Paw left for Kennedy, Punch remained in the Astoria house with the woman, but she was locked up in a small cellar cubbyhole, and so far had never got one look at him. Paw Paw, another dimwit from some crummy little Alabama town, had no local police record, which meant that no one at Kennedy could possibly recognize him. Half an hour before the plane from K.C. got in, he would approach the information desk, holding a handkerchief to his face as if he had a heavy cold, and there he'd leave the briefcase for Mr. Hennessey. Which meant there could be no possible tie-in to Paw Paw at all—and, much more important, no possible tie-in to Punch Coughlin. How could there be? Just perfect. Foolproof.

The husband must have received his instructions this morning, and in the woman's handwriting, which would let him know she was still alive. Therefore, if he had a brain in his head, he would walk into a coffee shop on 46th Street at ten sharp tonight, put down a suitcase by the coat rack, and walk out. Whereupon the wild man, following his instructions, and with Paw Paw watching the whole thing from the end of the counter, would go over to the coat rack to get his hat, and then, as if it were his own, pick up the suitcase with the $300,000 ransom money in it.

So how could Punch Coughlin miss? If police were around, despite the explicit instructions to the husband, the wild man would be grabbed right away—but what the hell could he tell anybody? Paw Paw, having identified the wild man when he picked up the briefcase at Kennedy, would be watching all the action.

But say the police were not there. Then all Paw Paw had to do

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was to follow the wild man to 44th and Broadway, and there, with a murmured word or two, take the suitcase before the wild man had any chance at all to look inside and see what he had.

Simple as that. $300,000 in hard cash for Punch and Paw Paw—and the woman dumped out of a car, sometime about three in the morning, out in the wilds of Long Island. Still alive? But Punch had to make up his mind about that. Might be much better the other way. Shut her mouth once and for all.

There was a certain strain, however, waiting in the Astoria house for Paw Paw to show up with the ransom money. He should have been back no later than eleven o'clock, the way Punch figured, but he did not finally arrive until a quarter past twelve. There was no suitcase with him, and no ransom money. He looked kind of scared for Paw Paw.

"Wait'll I tell you," he blurted out, before even removing his topcoat. "There must have been about twenty cops waiting all around that coffee shop, inside and out. The wild man was all right. He did just what your note told him to do. He gets up from his chair the minute this guy Sanderson walks out after leaving the suitcase—and let me tell you something. You never saw such a tough-looking guy in your whole life. He's about six feet four, with a coat he can't even button around him, he's so big, but the second he picks up the suitcase about four cops crowd in around him.

"But he knew how to handle them, all right. Talks quiet at first, like he's answering their questions, with kind of a silly grin on his face, and then talks to another of them, I guess a lieutenant or something, that they bring in from outside. I don't know what the hell he told them, but I guess whatever kind of a story he was able to think up. So they start him out, and he's still grinning like that—but all of a sudden he shoves out those two arms of his, quick as a flash, and knocks the whole bunch of them into a table.

"I couldn't believe the thing, Punch, only I saw it. So the lieutenant scrambles up with a gun, only the wild man is a hell of a lot quicker. He misses a couple of times, shooting into a big mirror in back of the counter, but then he must have got the lieutenant right between the eyes. All you can see, after the table rolls over, is about a gallon of blood on his face.

"After that it's like one of them old Keystone Cop comedies. The wild man picks up one of them, just like you might pick up a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

broomstick, and knocks them all down again. The last thing I see, he's ducking out through the front door with his gun in his right hand and the suitcase in his left. God Almighty! He ain't a man, Punch. He was like some great big animal, the way he could move."

"Did they catch him outside?"

"Him?" Paw Paw said, still awed. "Hell, a whole army division wouldn't have caught him. Now of course everybody in the coffee shop is screaming and yelling at all the shots, and when I run out I see a taxicab racing away, with the wild man holding a gun to the driver's head. Then there's a lot more shooting, but I don't think they came even close to hitting him with all the people around that they had to watch out for. Two squad cars ram together, trying to wheel around and follow the cab, and that ties everything up. So he got away all right, and what the hell do we do now? He's got our money!"

Punch Coughlin, hands in hip pockets, walked to the front window, not noticing anything at all outside, then walked back. And a wild man, he remembered, who didn't like to be clipped—and who certainly wouldn't like to be paid $3,500 for a suitcase he must know now held $300,000 in hard cash. At that thought Punch's leathery dark cheeks began to show a thin film of sweat.

"Did you meet him at 44th then? Did you even have the brains to see if he was waiting for you?"

"But that's how crazy he is," Paw Paw whispered. "There's three or four squad cars on every block around by that time—and right where we told him to wait there he is, just like nothing at all had happened. I saw him from a cab I took."

"Still with the suitcase?"

Paw Paw nodded hurriedly.

"Right between his legs. Got a big cigar in his mouth, and a head of red hair that's blazing out of the crowd around him just like a lamp. So how in hell did you expect me to stop? He had to be picked up, and any second. I just got the hell out of there as fast as I could."

Punch Coughlin sat down at the table, his thin jaws tightening even more. Everything perfect, not the least hole anywhere—and now this!

"Oh, they got him, all right," he said grimly, "and the money with him. Well, we told Sanderson, the dame's husband. We warned him. We kept our part of the bargain. Now we just do

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what we told him we'd do if he tried to pull anything."

Paw Paw blinked vaguely and rubbed his mouth.

"You mean kill the wife?" he whispered. "But we still got her, Punch—and they can't have any idea at all who we are. We could try again, maybe. Why the hell not? Look. Her husband got back his $300,000 all right, and this time, after everything going wrong the way it did, he'll be scared stiff. Suppose we wait a couple of days, then have her call him up herself to prove that she's still alive? Three hundred thousand bucks, remember—that's big scratch. The next time he'll be so relieved to hear from her that I think he'll pay off without going anywhere near the cops. He'd be too scared, Punch. They bolloxed up the whole thing!"

And, everything considered, it seemed to Punch Coughlin that they certainly had. Mail Sanderson a note first, saying that his wife had been killed, just as promised. Then let her talk to him from a pay phone out in the sticks, with nobody around—and he'd probably be so relieved that he'd pay anything to get her back well and alive. He had cooperated with the police once and they had failed him. Now, all alone, he'd do it the safe way. He'd pay the dough.

"Then take a look at her and see that she's still okay," Punch ordered. "But maybe you're right, Paw Paw. Maybe we had better sleep on it. No rush till tomorrow, anyway. We don't even know yet if they caught the wild man."

But they had not caught him when the one o'clock radio news came on, though the scene in the coffee shop was described in great detail, if a little inaccurately.

"In an apparent attempted holdup of the Elton Coffee Shop on West 46th Street," Punch heard, "a veteran police officer of seventeen years' service, Lieutenant Albert J. Gilhooley, who leaves a wife and four children, was shot and killed by an unknown assailant about ten o'clock tonight. Although squads of police officers are still scouring the whole Midtown District, no word of an arrest has yet been received. The gunman has been described by witnesses as a male Caucasian, at least six feet in height, and with flaming red hair. Lieutenant Gilhooley, who joined the force on December 3rd, 1959, resided at—"

Punch snapped the radio off, but early the next morning he learned that the search for the wild man was still on. Which meant that he was free as air now, wherever he was—and with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Punch Coughlin's $300,000. It sent a spasm of almost blinding hatred through him. Down in the cellar he slapped the woman hard on the right side of her face, and when she sobbed weakly and turned her head in the paper bag that was tied around it, with only two holes to breathe through, he slapped her again on the left side. After that, his tension somewhat relieved, he called another friend in K.C., not Joe Mars this time, and asked if he knew anyone named Pal Hennessey.

"Don't even remind me," the friend said. "You never met a real psycho until you met him. Cute as hell, you understand, the way those people sometimes are—but kind of real changeable too. Give you the shirt off his back one second—and then, if you happen to cross him in any way, break your head open the next. You been stupid enough to get mixed up with him, have you?"

"No, not personally," Punch lied, controlling his voice pretty well. "But how do you suppose he'd act if he got his hands on—well, say, thirty or forty thousand dollars in hard cash?"

"Tear the whole world apart," Punch was assured. "He'd have to. He just finished a six-year stretch out in San Quentin, so he's got to be all primed. He'd begin throwing dough around like there was no end to it, handing it out to street bums or anyone he thought needed it. That's how he gets whenever he's flush—booze, girls, cars, clothes, whatever the hell he can buy. Old Pal with thirty or forty grand in his pocket would stir up a hurricane from coast to coast. It would last him about three days."

Punch remained at least a full minute in the booth after that, trembling all over from the pressure of crazy, hating rage that had taken hold of him. A city of ten or twelve million people—and the wild man walking around in it with Punch Coughlin's $300,000 in his pocket. Only where was he? Where in hell was he and what was he doing?

Punch could not eat anything. He could not even slap the dame any more. If he started, Punch knew, he couldn't stop himself—and they might still need her. About ten that night Paw Paw went down to the corner bar for a few drinks and when he came back he had an early-morning edition of the tabloid newspaper. He could not talk, or at least not intelligently. He could only point, finger shaking, at the gossip column that Paw Paw read religiously.

It showed the picture of a big black-haired man with dark glasses on, who was holding up a thick sheaf of bills in each hand,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and with a crazy kind of grin on his face. There were a lot of people around him, with an enchanting blonde girl on his left arm, and an even more ravishing brunette on his right arm. They too were waving money at the crowd, handfuls of it, but the big black-haired man towered over everyone else.

"You know what that is?" Paw Paw managed to whisper finally. "It's him! It's that damn wild man spending *our* money, throwing it around like water, Punch. Read what it says!"

And what it said, in brief, was that New York had been visited by another Mr. Bountiful from the Texas oil country. About one that afternoon he had driven up to a Cadillac showroom on Broadway, tipped the cabbie $50, bought a silver-colored Cadillac for the blonde, a black one for the brunette, and a pure white one for himself, paying for the purchases in cash. On the way out, when he had seen an old woman scrabbling in a corner trash can, he had walked up behind her and dumped a fistful of fifty-dollar bills into her hands. When people began to crowd up, he had laughed boisterously and tossed more fifty-dollar bills into the air for them to catch.

At the corner he had given a boy named Arthur Goldberg, of West 87th Street, a twenty-dollar bill for picking up a package he dropped. After that, with hundreds of people now fighting to get near him, he had walked on scattering more bills to right and left. At three in the afternoon, throwing open the window of his Park Avenue Hotel suite, he had roared, "Come and get it, folks! Come and tell all your troubles to Mr. Bountiful!"—and thrown down handful after handful of tens and twenties.

The waiter who served him his lunch got a hundred-dollar tip and the manicure girl at the hotel two hundred. In the lobby he had dropped thousands of dollars into the lap of a Sister of Mercy, and when the columnist called him up he had said that he intended to give away $1000 apiece to anyone who needed it, at the corner of 72nd Street and Fifth Avenue at ten sharp tomorrow morning.

An enormous crowd was already gathering at that point, the columnist said, and special squads of police had been called on duty to handle the mob. Mr. Bountiful, whose real name was Ralph J. Paine, of Houston, Texas, according to the hotel register, was occupying Suite 823 at the hotel, and thousands of people were blocking all traffic below, apparently in the hope that he would again open his window.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Punch Coughlin did not say anything at all after he had read that. He could not. The hatred in him was like a vise crushing his whole body.

"And see what he did so the cops wouldn't spot him?" Paw Paw whispered as savagely as Punch Coughlin looked. "He dyed his hair black, or else bought a wig and them dark glasses. But it's him, all right. I made him right off, Punch. And he's giving away *our* money!"

And if the newspaper was right, Punch realized, the wild man would be giving away even more tomorrow morning—$1000 apiece to anyone who struck his fancy. That was exactly how his friend in Kansas City had described Pal Hennessey. He would give you the shirt off his back one second—and the next, if you happened to cross him in any way, he was just as liable to break your neck. Even Joe Mars had called him a psycho.

By telephone Punch made a hurried reservation for Sir Charles Ramsey and man—Punch could be quite the English gentleman when he wanted to be—and about midnight he appeared at the hotel, Paw Paw in tow, wearing a Brooks Brothers suit, a Homburg hat, and a club tie. But it took them ten minutes to fight their way to the hotel doorman and even longer to get across an even more crowded lobby to the reservations desk.

"My friend Lord Charles Carmody informed me last week that he had found very adequate accommodations on your eighth floor," he announced in a perfect Oxonian accent. "But I trust your service people will be able to get this most frightful commotion under control. Exactly what is the problem you're having?"

And it was all explained to him by a deferential clerk in a wing collar and tails while Punch registered for Suite 816 at $225 a night. $225 a night! When he heard that, Punch was able to control himself only with considerable effort. "A very odd country," he told the clerk. "Very odd characters, indeed. One could not even conceive of such a thing in dear old London. Handing away money to anyone who asks for it. How very fantastic!"

Up in Suite 816 he tipped the bellboy a modest but adequate two dollars, and then, alone with Paw Paw, with the door locked, he removed a long-barreled pistol with a silencer attachment from one of his suitcases. Then he and Paw Paw sat in grim silence, not speaking one word, until three in the morning. It was quiet then—no more crowd noise and no more security men on watchful duty in the eighth-floor corridor.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Guess everybody figures he's turned in for the night," Paw Paw whispered. "How we going to handle it, Punch?"

"How would you figure?" Punch gritted. "With somebody like him? I'm going to blow his head off, the stinking rat, the second he opens the door for us. He has the dough in there or what's left of it—and this thing ain't going to make any more noise than a cork popping. Come on."

They stepped out into the hall, Punch leading. There was no need to walk softly. At $225 a night there was ankle-deep carpeting. Down before Suite 823 Punch looked right and left quickly, but still saw nothing. He rang the bell.

"Punch," someone said from the room opposite, the room behind him, "do it like they say in the movies. Just stand there, just keep facing the door—and drop the gun, Louie. You're all through, Punch. We have six guys covering you and your sidekick from in here. Do just what you're told."

"Well," the Commissioner said, "it was the damnedest, most mixed-up thing I ever heard of. We'd been working on what we thought were two different cases and all of a sudden they come together. First of all, we're trying to find that kidnaped society woman, Mrs. J. Noel Sanderson—and also, in what we think is another area, we're after a fellow named Punch Coughlin, who shot dead a bank policeman last year during a holdup.

"We knew Punch had some Kansas City connections—in particular a fellow named Joe Mars who has some pretty rugged boys for hire when you want something done, something crooked, of course. So we asked K.C. to keep their eyes and ears open and it finally paid off.

"Not long ago they managed to tap Joe's private wire and overheard a telephone conversation with somebody called Punch. The other guy tried to cover up the name right away, but Joe used it twice, so we were pretty sure. So what to do? Punch was up to something, all right, but we still didn't know where he was or how to get at him. The only thing we could do was play possum.

"We had only one thing in our favor. From the conversation we learned that Punch had never seen the boy he was getting. That was a break. So the K.C. people pick up Joe Mars's boy, a real psycho named Pal Hennessey, as he was getting on the plane out there, and on this end we slip in a ringer, one of our own men named Big Harry Nolan.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But Punch handled it damned cute. Out at Kennedy there's nobody to meet Nolan, only a briefcase with the money he was promised and a note of instructions. The only thing we can do then is follow the instructions, which tell Nolan to go to a coffee shop on West 46th Street at ten o'clock and pick up a suitcase that a guy will leave right by the coat rack. Then he's to go outside with it, walk to the corner of 44th Street, and wait there till another guy comes along in a taxicab and takes it from him. Only what happens? At the coffee shop we find out that our own man is being used to pick up the ransom money for Mrs. Sanderson who was abducted a couple of days ago while walking her French poodle.

"Naturally there's a lot of confusion at first. The men in the coffee shop don't know Nolan, and Nolan doesn't know them. So they have to call in Al Gilhooley from outside to make sure, since Nolan and Gilhooley are old friends. Well, Al is pretty quick with his head, and of course it's odds on that one of the kidnapers is right there in the coffee shop watching everything that happens. We still can go on with the thing, but now we have to make it look real good.

"Suppose we pretend to let Nolan shoot down Al Gilhooley and then fight his way clear? Then maybe the kidnapers will still meet the guy they think is Pal Hennessey on the corner of 44th Street to pick up the money, and we'll have them right in our hands. So everybody stages a big phony fight, and when Al is knocked down over a table he pours a bottle of ketchup on his head, just like he's been shot dead, and it looks like Nolan has fought his way out."

"Quick thinking for Al," the Assistant Commissioner approved. "But it didn't work out that way?"

"Unfortunately, no. They never show up on 44th Street. They must have been too scared. Then the only thing we can do is call K.C. again, get all the information we can on Hennessey, and play along. Out there they tell us that Pal is a real wild man and when he gets any money starts throwing it around like a drunken sailor. Then suppose, Al suggests, we let him start throwing it around? Suppose we plant a couple of newspaper stories about a Mr. Bountiful out of Houston, Texas—and even include a photo of him? Then what is Punch Coughlin going to do?

"The whole picture is now reversed, Gerry. The kidnapers can put the pressure on us because they still have Mrs. Sanderson—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but this time we can put the pressure on them because we got the money, or at least they think Hennessey's got it. They have to go out after him—and they do. We even make it simple as pie for them by putting in the paper what hotel he's staying at and what his suite number is.

"After that everybody who registers at the hotel is photographed by a hidden camera and half an hour after Punch checks in, the word comes back from headquarters who he is. Well, the hotel begs us not to start a shooting match to get him out of his suite, and they were so cooperative all the way that we agree. Let him come out himself, we decided, to take care of the wild man—and at three o'clock he does just that.

"Then there was no trouble at all. We had everything ready. They're two fish on a counter, all wrapped up for delivery, and they know it. In about half an hour we get Punch's dim-witted pal to say where they have Mrs. Sanderson—and of course all that show of giveaway money was just a put-on. Nolan handed practically all of it to our own people made up one way or another—and know what it actually cost to make it look good? Just a little over $900.

"And Sanderson isn't kicking a bit. All in all, we saved him $299,100—and he got his wife back safe and sound, while we got Punch. So Nolan was Mr. Bountiful, all right—only for us, Gerry, and not for them. Now what's that other thing you wanted to see me about?"

NEXT MONTH...

13 NEW stories—including

MICHAEL GILBERT (about Petrella)

BRIAN GARFIELD (about a glory hunter)

RUTH RENDELL (about a glowing future)

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Dr. Sam Hawthorne)

BARRY PEROWNE (about Raffles)

H. R. F. KEATING (about Inspector Ghote)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* crime-detective story by

CHRISTIANNA BRAND

Someone once said (strange we can't find it in Bartlett) that "seeing is believing." And Aesop once said that "appearances are deceptive." Well, all life is full of contradictions. But then again, perhaps both are right . . .

UPON REFLECTION

by CHRISTIANNA BRAND

The rain had stopped. Mrs. Dorinda Jones sat back, small and exquisite in the corner of her taxi cab, fastidiously holding her damp umbrella. The traffic was jammed solid but she was sufficiently entertained (between uneasy glances at the steadily ticking meter) by contemplation of a rather divine pair of boots in a shop window across the road—and the new nursing home in process of completion, a little ahead and to the left of her.

The nursing home was being financed by Arab oil. It was a magnificent edifice apparently hewn from a block of gleaming black marble, with lots of lovely curlicues in what was doubtless solid gold. She was amused to observe with what opportunist haste a grand new restaurant had been opened next door to it—apparently for an Arab clientèle, for dozens of white-robed gentlemen were at this moment pouring out, evidently from some celebration luncheon. The commissionaire, enormously impressive in scarlet coat, peaked cap, and prodigious brass buttons, was dashing from the door of one magnificent car to another, crumpling into a white cotton palm the unconsidered five- and even ten-pound notes.

Mrs. Jones recognized one of the Arab gentlemen as Sheik Horror-Horror. Well, she called him that—one read these foreign names in the papers and never got around to actually pronouncing them. And a proper horror he seemed to be, rich as Croesus

© 1977 by Christianna Brand.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but grinding away at the poor back home in Wherever-it-was, and well known to have killed off all sorts of nice harmless people, including several wives and even a couple of expendable sons, who had stood between him and some monstrous coup or other. Mrs. Dorinda Jones was an ardent, if not very accurate, follower of the more sensational items of world news.

A small gap had opened in the traffic and her taxi moved forward a few yards. She diverted her gaze to the boots in the shop window opposite which now came more clearly into view—and when she looked round again, one of the magnificent cars had crept up beside them, between herself and the new building; the gold curlicues seemed to be Arab writing after all. And Sheik Horror-Horror was on a level with her, lying back in a corner of his Rolls-Royce, his hands folded in the lap of his flowing white gown.

The Sheik's eyes were closed, but he opened them for a moment, gave her a baleful glare, and closed them again. But what was really most peculiar, thought Mrs. Jones, was that he now had with him in the car the most extraordinary companion. The Rolls was on the V.I.P. pattern, with glass cutting off the driver's seat from the driven, and behind the glass were two little tip-up, forward-facing seats, such as young princes are wont to perch upon, on Royal occasions. And on one of the seats, staring straight ahead of him was a rough-looking man—not an Arab, but a good old Cockney type he looked, middle-aged, with a sharp profile, untidy dark hair, and, from what she could glimpse of it, a cheap, rather shabby old jacket.

A bodyguard? But what a strange sort of bodyguard to be chosen, and, anyway, Sheik Horror-Horror was known to disdain any sort of protective entourage—a man so universally detested (he might well realize) would be unable to rely on anyone at all and might as well trust only himself. There were other reasons also, she was to learn, for his preferring to travel unattended—not pretty reasons at all. If ever there was a born murderee, Sheik Horror-Horror was it.

And so indeed it was to prove. That very evening there was headline news—the chauffeur had driven up to the palatial mansion somewhere outside Ascot, and the welcome-home party, scurrying out to open the door and usher His Excellency out, had discovered him slumped all anyhow in his corner, with a dagger plunged into his back.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The chauffeur's name was Smith, an Englishman; and by the following morning Smith found himself in the situation known as "helping the police with their inquiries." The Sheik had been seen out of and away from the restaurant alive and well; the way home had passed through quiet countryside and Smith had confessedly been alone in the car with the Sheik all that time. The weapon proved to be a knife of Arabic design, used universally both as weapon and decoration. It bore no fingerprints.

Mrs. Dorinda Jones lapped up every word of it. But—"Alone in the car with the Sheik all that time."

"How very odd!" said Mrs. Jones and she rang up a very grand person at Scotland Yard—Mrs. Jones knew simply *everyone*—and said, "But what about the rough-looking man?"

The chauffeur, Smith, received the information about the rough-looking man with passionate gratitude. His own position was dicey in the extreme. Blood had been found on his hands and uniform—he had, of course, helped get the body out of the car—and he'd never made a secret, and therefore could make none now, of his fear and loathing of his employer. Also he had admitted to having seen no intruder, rough-looking or otherwise; but the car had been crawling through the traffic and was frequently at a standstill, and the glass partition was soundproof and opaque; it had been perfectly possible for someone to have entered and left the car, without Smith becoming aware of it.

"He did a lot of talking business in the back of that car, sir," said Smith, earnestly explaining to the police. "And—other things."

Smith had been with the Sheik for several years, living in a lodge on the grounds of the mansion and driving the Rolls whenever His Excellency was in England. A cushy job—yes, indeed—except when His Excellency was in England. *Not* a considerate employer, the suspect quite frankly confided: ill-tempered, intemperate, bullying, and downright diabolical to those poor people he'd bring with him when he came over from Wherever-it-was—it had made Smith's blood boil to see it.

And one habit he'd had—"He'd pick up these poor girls, sir, in some night club or other and drive them home. Even through the soundproof glass I've heard the screams. And then I'd be got up at any hour of the night to drive them back where they belonged. More dead than alive some of them, poor little creatures. I swear it used to make me sick."

"Not so sick that you thought of telling the police?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But Smith had seen what happened to those few wretches who had ever dared to rebel against Sheik Horror-Horror; and you could get away and hide at the ends of the earth and his thugs would still find you. Besides— "Poor kids, they'd hired theirselves out, sir, hadn't they? And been paid. Paid fortunes, sir. And taken the money. Gone wrong in life, poor little devils," said Smith, "and lost their way and come to this."

M'm. Mr. Smith wouldn't by any chance have a daughter himself who had lost her way in life?

"*Me,* sir?" said Smith. He drew himself up. "Do I look like a man who could have a daughter fallen to such depths as that?"

But he'd forgotten, confided her highly placed friend to Mrs. Jones, that he was not now wearing a smart uniform and peaked cap; in mufti any man might look as though he could have had a poor daughter gone wrong. Which could have been a motive.

"But what about my rough-looking man?" insisted Mrs. Jones. "I mean that *must* exonerate him?"

And in fact it did. Mrs. Jones's cab driver was sought and found, and he conceded that, though he'd been looking ahead watching the traffic, he might just have caught out of the corner of his eye a glimpse of the rough-looking man in the Rolls. The police sighed heavily and said goodbye to Mr. Smith. No one—not even back home in Wherever-it-was, as Mrs. Jones would have said—was anything but delighted that Sheik Horror-Horror had got his just deserts. It was highly embarrassing to the British government, all the same. The police were understood to be keeping a sharp eye out to this day for Mrs. Dorinda Jones's rough-looking man.

Mr. Smith, however, in an ecstasy of gratitude, approached Mrs. Jones with a large, if rather ill-assorted, bunch of flowers. He had now joined a car-rental firm and any time Mrs. Jones wanted to do a bit of shopping—that would be on the house. Mrs. Jones accepted with simple delight and on their first excursion suggested driving past the scene of the crime; there had been a rather divine pair of boots in the window of a shop, and she wondered if they might still be there.

At the Arab restaurant the lunchtime rush had not yet begun and the commissionaire came forward hopefully when the traffic halted their car outside its doors. He seemed to recognize her—Mrs. Jones was highly photogenic and her pictures had vied in the papers with Identikit portraits of the rough-looking man—and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the commissionaire's large florid face took on a rather strange tinge of gray.

"How odd!" thought Mrs. Jones. "Just a minute," she said to Smith, and stepped out of the opened door. "You've given up your nice white cotton gloves," she said to the commissionaire.

He went grayer still. "I found that they showed the dirt, madam."

"And stains? But if they got stained, you could take them off and stuff them into a pocket. And then, of course, there's the question of fingerprints." She looked at him very kindly. "Have you by any chance got a young daughter?" she asked.

His hands were beginning to shake; it was horrible. "I had a daughter, madam," he said. "She's dead now. She died in the hospital of—injuries." He pulled himself together. "The police asked me these questions, Mrs. Jones. It was you who told them that when you saw him in the car driving away from here, the Sheik was alive and well."

"He was alive," said Mrs. Jones. "I wouldn't know about well. He did open his eyes, it's true, and looked at me. But—I ought to have realized it before—it was not at all the look that a gentleman all that keen on girls might be expected to give one. A terrible look, almost as though—well, almost as though I'd stabbed him in the back. Or *someone* had stabbed him in the back. Then his eyes closed again."

A silence. The commissionaire said at last, "What will you do?"

"I'll have to think about it," said Mrs. Jones. "I mean, there's one's duty and all that. But I'd let you know first."

She got back into the car, but before he closed the door on her she leaned out and put her small gloved hand on his arm. "I'm very, very sorry about your daughter," she said.

It was an awful situation just the same. "*I* don't know," she said to Smith as the car moved on again. "Ought one to tell?"

They came once more opposite the black marble nursing home with its gold curlicues. "You've forgotten, madam," said Smith. "There's still the rough-looking man."

"Oh, yes, so there is," said Mrs. Jones thankfully. She gave no thought at all to the divine boots in the shop across the road. "We'd stopped just about here. The rough-looking man was sitting—" She broke off. A car was drawn up at the door of the nursing home and a patient was being assisted to alight. Only the driving seat was now occupied. "What an odd coincidence!" said

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mrs. Jones. "Their chauffeur has the same uniform you have, Mr. Smith."

Smith turned his head to look and in the same movement the other chauffeur turned and looked straight back at him. "Yes, he has, madam, hasn't he?" said Smith. "And what's more, the same face."

"Oh," said Mrs. Jones in a small voice. "Yes. So he has!" She thought it all over in her own cool little way. "That day," she said. "It was raining. I had my umbrella up and my head down. I suppose I never looked at my taxi driver at all—not to recognize him if I saw him—well, in some different situation."

"In a mirror, for example," said Smith. "That black marble, you know—when it's wet it does get a shine on it. You could see your face in it, really you could."

"Or somebody else's. I saw my own taxi driver, didn't I? He was the rough-looking man," said Mrs. Jones humbly. "He'd be sitting a bit ahead of me the way you are now. And through the window of the car drawn up beside me, I'd see him in the mirror of black marble and he'd look as though he were sitting in that Rolls."

"That's the way I worked it out," said Smith. "Last time I drove past here on a rainy day. I daresay when the police were here to investigate, it happened always to be fine."

"Yes. Well. I suppose one ought to whiz off this *minute* and confess to them?" She didn't seem too much delighted at the prospect.

"Perhaps one should. On the other hand," said Smith, "you never saw those girls like I did, madam, when His Excellency was done with them. Crying all the way home in the car, poor little devils. And that chap, the commissionaire—his girl, she's dead. Died in the hospital, he said."

"So if everyone just goes on believing in the existence of the rough-looking man . . . I really do think on the whole that I ought to keep quiet about it. Don't you, Smith?" said Mrs. Dorinda Jones hopefully. She added, "Upon reflection."

"Q"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Against the background of a Fourth of July weekend, Captain Leopold and his staff investigate a strange case: Had Herbert Towne been able to communicate with a dead child? The case twists and turns with new developments that crackle like holiday firecrackers . . .

NO HOLIDAY FOR CAPTAIN LEOPOLD

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"Do you believe in communication with the dead?" Martha April's husband asked. It was the early evening of Friday, July 1st, and they were eating steaks he'd broiled on the backyard grill.

She stared across the picnic table at him, wondering at the sincerity of his question. Hugh had always been a scoffer at such things, but now he seemed serious. "Don't tell me the firm of April & August is finally going to publish a book on it!" She knew they'd steered clear of books on mysticism and parapsychology.

"I don't really know. I've been approached by someone about such a book. An interesting chap, though he seems a bit weird."

"Aren't most of your writers? For that matter isn't your partner a little weird?"

Hugh April looked at her with exasperation. "Come on, Martha, are we back to that again?"

"I'm sorry, dear. Tell me about this weird writer."

Her husband settled down, savoring his glass of red wine. "He wrote me last week, and I talked with him on the phone this morning. He's staying near here and I'm to meet with him tonight."

"What has he written?"

© 1977 by Edward D. Hoch.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Apparently he's never been published before, But he's outlined a book based on a documented case of communication with the dead. He wants April & August to publish it."

"And you're considering it?"

"Well, I talked it over with Nelson already and of course he's against it. The man wants too much of an advance, for one thing."

She picked up the wine bottle to refill her glass. "What's his name?"

"Herbert Towne."

"Damn—I've spilled the wine! Go on talking, dear, while I get a towel."

"The outline looked quite promising to me. It involves a child apparently beaten to death by his parents some years back. The parents hid the body in the basement of their apartment building, moved away, and appear to have started a new life. The police were unable to even establish their identity. It's a crime that could never have gone unsolved a generation ago, in a less mobile society. But by the time the boy's body was found, some two years had elapsed. So many people had come and gone in the apartment house that the police had no leads. But Towne claims a successful attempt was made to communicate with the dead boy and learn the name of his parents."

"I'm sorry to scoff at it, Hugh, but I'm just not a believer."

"I may not be either," he admitted. "I'll know better after tonight."

It was the following afternoon, the first day of the long Fourth of July weekend, when Leopold asked policewoman Connie Trent, "Going away over the holiday, Connie?"

She shook her head. "Neither is Lieutenant Fletcher. How about you?"

"Nope. As long as I had to come in today, I figured the weekend was shot. Fletcher's wife invited me out there on Monday, but if we get anything like last summer's rash of holiday stickups I'll probably be right here working."

"You came from a small town, didn't you? It must have been fun there on the Fourth of July."

"I suppose I had the best of all worlds while I was growing up. I lived in Chicago till I was eight, when my folks were killed in an accident. Then I lived with my aunt and uncle in Riger Falls till I was fourteen. I moved here with another aunt during my high-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

school years, then moved to New York, married, and joined their police department. Finally I moved back here after my divorce. I suppose Riger Falls was the most fun on the Fourth though. There was always the parade, and the band concert in the park, and then the fireworks at night."

Fletcher stuck his head in the door. "Captain, I've got a woman outside wants to report a disappearance. She's afraid something's happened to her husband. Want to see her?"

"All right," Leopold said. It was a slow day and he had to earn his pay. "Send her in. You can stay, Connie."

The woman's name was Martha April and to Leopold's eyes there was nothing remarkable about her appearance. She was obviously well dressed, in her mid-thirties, and with a face and figure that were pleasant without being memorable. Her husband, she explained, was a partner in a small New York book-publishing company.

"He's disappeared," she told Leopold and Connie. "He never came home last night."

"The usual routine is to file a missing-persons report downstairs. We deal with violent crimes here, and I hope you won't need our services."

"I came to you because I'm afraid he may have been murdered," she said. "As I told you, he's a partner in April & August, the New York publisher. He commutes to the city two days a week and works the rest of the time at home. His partner, Nelson August, handles the day-to-day operations. They do mainly small printings of nonfiction books. Both of them were with other publishers before they teamed up to start the company five years ago."

"Have you contacted him about your husband's disappearance?"

"He was the first one I called, at one this morning, but he knows more than I do—that Hugh had arranged to meet an author about a book idea."

"Anything unusual about that?" Leopold asked.

"No, except the man's book is about psychic phenomena—communication with the dead. April & August has always avoided such books in the past."

"What was the author's name?"

"Herbert Towne. That's all I know about him."

"Did your husband stay away overnight before? Could there be—pardon me—another woman?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He's only been away on business trips. We've been very close since our marriage three years ago, so I'm certain there's no one else. The children by his former marriage treat me just like their own mother."

"Where is their mother?"

"She had a drinking problem and a breakdown just after Hugh divorced her. But now she has the children back and is living in St. Louis."

"Look, we'll send you down to Missing Persons to fill out the necessary forms, but I promise my department will get on the investigation too."

"Thank you."

She started to rise from her chair and Connie asked, "Did your husband say where he was meeting Towne?"

"No, but it was somewhere up here, not in New York. I assumed it was at the man's hotel."

Fletcher took Martha April downstairs to Missing Persons and Leopold turned to Connie. "I wonder why she suspects he's been murdered," he said. "Chances are he'll turn up with a perfectly logical explanation. But at least you can check the local hotels for this fellow Towne."

Connie nodded. "They won't be doing too much business over the holiday. He should be easy to find if he's here."

Connie started with phone calls to the downtown hotels, then began checking the suburban motels and tourist homes. She was near the bottom of her list when she tried a resort motel on Long Island Sound, some ten miles outside the city. Yes, there was a Herbert Towne registered there. Did she wish to speak with him?

Connie decided a personal interview would be best. She drove out along to the Seafarer Motel and left her unmarked car in the lot near the main entrance. She didn't really expect any trouble but she made certain her service revolver was handy in her purse.

"Is Herbert Towne in his room?" she asked the desk clerk.

"Key's gone. He's either in his room or he took the key with him. It's number 26-A."

"Thanks."

She walked down the long corridor until she found the room. When no one answered her knock she went outside and walked around the building counting windows until she found the one for 26-A. The gauzy white curtains were drawn against the afternoon

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sun, but she could see that the bed was made and the room apparently unoccupied. She couldn't tell if there were clothes and a suitcase in the closet.

Connie went back to the front desk and showed her badge. "Police business," she told the clerk. "I'd like you to open 26-A and establish whether or not Herbert Towne's things are still there.

"They better be—he has an unpaid bill!"

"Don't you usually get payment in advance?"

"He paid for the first night but then he decided to stay over." The clerk led the way back down the corridor and unlocked the door.

As Connie had suspected, the closet was empty. There was no sign of Towne or his belongings. "Didn't the maid notify you that the room was empty?" she asked.

The clerk picked up the phone and called the housekeeper. He asked the question, then listened to the reply. When he hung up he said, "Maid reports the room wasn't used. Bed wasn't slept in. She just checked it this morning and passed it by. Figured Towne changed his mind about staying over."

Connie went into the bathroom and glanced at the towel rack. Everything seemed untouched. The toilet, sink, and bathtub were clean. "All right," she said. "I guess there's nothing here."

As they were about to leave the room she decided to have a look at the window. It covered the entire outer wall above the heating and air-conditioning equipment, but was divided into several separate panels. The long horizontal panel at the bottom lifted to admit fresh air. It was on the lever that unlocked and lifted this panel that she found the darkish stain.

She peered out at where she'd stood looking in the window and noticed a broken branch on one of the low bushes.

"I'll have to make a call," she told the room clerk. "What's your name?"

"Jimmy Quinn. Look, I've got to get back to the desk."

She ignored him and dialed Leopold's private line. When he answered she said, "Captain, this is Connie. I'm at the Seafarer Motel, Room 26-A, with the desk clerk. Herbert Towne was registered here but he's gone now. And I think I've found a bloodstain in the room."

"Forget it, Connie," Leopold told her. "Mrs. April just phoned in. Her husband is back home, safe and sound."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That should have been the end of it.

Except that Connie Trent wasn't satisfied.

"I brought some scrapings from that window latch, Captain. I'd like to have them analyzed."

Leopold leaned back in his chair. "What's the point? Hugh April is alive and well."

"But maybe Herbert Towne isn't."

He thought about that. "All right, Connie. Go get your analysis. If it's blood, we'll drive out and have a talk with Hugh April."

It proved to be blood. Human blood.

On Sunday morning Leopold phoned Hugh April and told him they were coming out. The publisher greeted Leopold and Connie at the front door and led them into his study while Martha hovered in the background. He was tall and handsome, about the same age as his wife.

"Sorry to bring you all the way out here," he said, shaking hands with both Leopold and Connie. "As you can see, my disappearance was a false alarm."

"And I feel just a bit foolish," Martha April chimed in.

"No reason to," Leopold assured her. "You did the proper thing in notifying us when you did, Mrs. April."

"Come in and sit down," her husband urged, though he remained standing. "Now what can I do for you?"

Leopold flipped open his notebook. "To complete our report we need to know where you were two nights ago, Mr. April."

The publisher chuckled. "They send detective captains around on such routine chores now? And on a holiday weekend?"

"I happened to be in the neighborhood," Leopold answered lamely. "We were told by Mrs. April that you planned to meet an author named Herbert Towne on the night you disappeared."

"Yes, I did meet him."

"And where did the meeting take place?"

"At his motel. I forget the name of it now."

"The Seafarer. Miss Trent here was able to locate it."

Hugh April seemed surprised. "Oh? Good detective work!"

"Only routine," Connie said.

"Well, I met him at this Seafarer Motel, in his room, and we went over the outline of his book. It's to be a book on life after death—specifically on communication with the dead, as exemplified by the case of a two-year-old boy who was beaten to death by his parents."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I see. And when did this crime take place?"

"Six years ago in Akron, Ohio. The child's body was hidden in a plastic bag inside a storage trunk in the basement of an apartment house. By the time it was found, two or three years had passed and it was impossible for the police to trace all the former residents of the apartment house."

"You mean a person could be killed and simply abandoned without anyone even missing him?"

The publisher shrugged. "It's the mobility of today's society, Captain. A generation ago most families stayed close to home, close to parents and grandparents. It's not so true any more. People move across the state, across the country, as easily as they once moved across town. Even family ties have weakened. An adult probably couldn't be killed and abandoned without someone missing him, but a two-year-old could be—and was."

"Wouldn't the neighbors have noticed?" Connie asked.

"If they did, they could have been told the child was visiting its grandparents. Then the couple moved away, leaving the body in its anonymous trunk. If the odor didn't attract attention, they'd be safe for years. Forever, apparently."

Leopold stirred in his chair. "And Herbert Towne took an interest in this case?"

"He did. He conducted séances to communicate with the dead child and learn the identity of the parents who had killed and abandoned him. The book is the story of his investigations."

"Are you going to publish it?"

"Towne wants too large an advance, far more than we usually pay. I'll have to discuss the matter with my partner."

Leopold cleared his throat. "You've told us about your meeting with Towne and about the man's book. But you haven't told us why you didn't come home that night."

"A foolish thing, really. We were drinking while we talked and I had a bit too much. I didn't feel I could drive home safely, so I took a room at the motel for the night. I should have phoned Martha."

"But you didn't turn up till yesterday afternoon."

"I must have overslept," he answered. "I had a real hangover."

"You were at the Seafarer Motel all that time?"

"Yes."

"Registered under your own name?"

Hugh April must have caught Leopold's sideways glance at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Connie. "Frankly, I don't really know. I must have passed out and Towne arranged for the room."

"I see. When you woke up yesterday afternoon, where was Herbert Towne?"

"I don't know. I didn't see him again."

"When you woke up did you notice any injury to yourself—a cut on the head where you may have fallen, for instance?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"There were traces of blood in Towne's motel room."

"Blood!" Martha April gasped.

"You see, Mr. April, now that you've been found, Herbert Towne seems to have disappeared. And we're wondering which of you the blood belongs to."

By the following day Leopold had both Fletcher and Connie working on the case. Connie had obtained a blood sample from Hugh April and established that the blood on the window latch was from the same type.

"It's the most common blood type," Leopold pointed out. "There's a good chance Towne had that type too."

"You're speaking of him in the past tense."

"I guess we both think he's dead. He was killed in that room and pushed through the window, breaking that bush on his way down. Then the killer loaded the body into a car and took it somewhere."

"You think Hugh April did that? But why?"

Leopold was about to answer when the intercom buzzed. "Man downstairs to see you, Captain. Says his name is Nelson August."

"The partner," Connie said.

Leopold nodded. "Send him up."

"What do you suppose he wants?"

"We'll know soon enough. Leave me alone with him, Connie, but listen in on the intercom and take notes."

Nelson August proved to be the opposite of Hugh April in almost every way. He was a short unattractive man with a big stomach and food stains on his tie. "I came up from New York on the train to see about this business," he began without any greeting. "Damn long train ride too!"

"I'm Leopold, and you're Nelson August—correct?"

"Yes, that's correct. Hugh April's partner. What's all this business about this guy Towne?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That's what we're trying to find out. He seems to have dropped out of sight."

"Disappeared?"

"We can't be sure of that because we don't know where he's from. The address he gave at his motel was a phony."

"I think the guy himself was a phony if you ask me! You know what sort of advance he wanted for that book of his? Fifty thousand! Why, the biggest advance April & August ever paid in its history was five thousand—for a cookbook by a famous chef."

"So you vetoed the deal?"

"I probably would have, unless Hugh wanted to put up his own money."

"Has he that kind of money?"

"Yes, he has. And he implied in our preliminary discussions that he might be willing to put it up himself if I wouldn't go along on the deal."

"It must have been very important to him."

"He said it could be our first best-seller."

"So you've come all the way up here from New York—for what?"

Nelson August brushed an invisible speck from his soiled necktie. "To see my partner, of course. I was just out to his house and Martha tells me he's too shaken up to see anyone. For Pete's sake, what's been happening here?"

"You know as much as we do," Leopold assured him. "Have you talked with your partner since his disappearance on Friday night?"

"No. His wife told me about it. I can't believe that Hugh would pass out from drinking too much."

"The story sounded dubious when I heard it," Leopold admitted.

"Maybe he was drugged—knockout drops or something."

"Either that or he's lying," Leopold suggested.

"Why would he lie?"

"There was a bloodstain in the room. If something happened to this man Towne in Hugh April's presence, it might explain why he's too upset to see you."

"Are you accusing my partner of a crime?"

"No. Not yet."

Nelson August got to his feet. "I came all the way up here on the Fourth of July expecting to get some information. All I get is a runaround—from you and my partner both!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm sorry about that," Leopold said. "All I can promise is that we'll keep you informed. Leave your home address and phone number. I think we already have your office number."

After August had gone, Leopold called Connie back in. "What do you think, Captain?"

"I don't know," he answered. "Let's see what Fletcher has."

Fletcher had been on the phone with the Akron police, trying to gather as much information as he could reasonably expect on a holiday. "Some of their records people are off duty today," he explained. "But I've learned enough to confirm what we already know. About three and a half years ago the janitor was cleaning out the apartment-house basement when he decided to do something about an untagged trunk in the storage area. When none of the tenants would claim it, he broke the lock and checked inside. The child's body was tightly wrapped in plastic, which probably cut down on the odor."

Leopold grunted. "How long had he been dead?"

"Two or three years. Probably closer to two. A white male about two years old at the time of death. Too young for school—even nursery school. No records anywhere, except a birth certificate maybe a thousand miles away. The parents moved in, probably killed the poor kid one night in a fit of anger, hid the body, and moved out. Some other city, some other life."

"The landlord must have records," Connie protested.

"Sure he does. The police narrowed it down to twenty-three families who'd come and gone during the crucial period. Of those twenty-three, they've traced and questioned fourteen. The other nine have moved so many times over the years that the trail's become cold. And chances are the guilty couple wanted it cold. No forwarding address, no clue to follow."

"Do you have the names of the families they weren't able to trace?"

"That's part of what's locked up for the weekend. But they said they could get someone down there with a key if it was urgent."

"It's urgent," Leopold decided. "Get back on the phone and tell them we need those names, all twenty-three of them. If the guilty parents felt they'd covered their tracks well enough, they might not have changed their names. A false name would cause too many problems with employers and social security and such."

Connie Trent was skeptical. "You're acting as if you believe this man Towne did communicate with the dead!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No, but if Herbert Towne needed an excuse to approach a publisher with the story of the killing, the idea of a book on communication with the dead was as good an excuse as any."

"Why would he think April & August, a publisher with no experience in that field, would pay fifty thousand for such a book?"

"Maybe he thought they'd pay fifty thousand *not* to publish it."

"What?"

"Connie, I want you to call someone at the newspaper and have them check their morgue for anything they've got on April and his wife. There should be something on the formation of the publishing company and on his marriage, at the very least. The company was formed five years back, according to Mrs. April, and they've been married about three years."

Connie was beginning to see the drift of Leopold's thinking.

"The company was begun about a year after that child was killed—probably just about the time Hugh April's first wife was having her breakdown."

Connie went off on her mission, leaving the captain to stare out the window at the almost empty parking lot. He knew he was missing Mrs. Fletcher's party, and keeping Fletcher from it besides, but the thing kept nagging at him. He watched a small boy setting off a string of illegal firecrackers, but didn't bother yelling at him. He was thinking of that other boy, who'd never grown old enough for fireworks.

Connie was the first to report back. "Here's what I've got, Captain. First, about the publishing company, from a business column."

"Read it to me."

" 'Local resident Hugh April has joined New Yorker Nelson August in the establishment of a new publishing company, April & August, with headquarters at 240 Park Avenue South in New York. Both are well known in Manhattan publishing circles, and are already being referred to as the Tweedledum and Tweedledee of the book trade. The new firm will specialize in nonfiction books on a variety of subjects, with its first titles due this fall.' "

"Interesting."

"The second clipping is about his marriage to Martha three years ago, but there's nothing of interest in it except that it was the second marriage for both of them. Nelson August was best man."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Is there a picture?"

"No, just this paragraph."

"Look what we've got, Connie. A man shows up with a fantastic story about communicating with a dead child. He offers a book about it to April & August, a small firm that's never done books on the occult. And he asks an advance of fifty thousand dollars—a sum that seems out of the question. August rejects it, but April hints he might be willing to deal. He meets the man in a motel room, something happens that causes a bloodstain, and April is missing overnight. He reappears, but now the man he was meeting seems to be missing. What does that sound like to you?"

"Blackmail?"

"Exactly. As I suggested before, Towne didn't want the money in payment for publishing the book, but for *not* publishing it. Since it's doubtful that April paid the money, it's beginning to look as if he might have murdered Herbert Towne."

"And that's why Fletcher is checking those names?"

"Exactly. Even though the paper doesn't mention it, April and his first wife might have lived in Ohio for a time. The crime would be a better explanation for her breakdown."

They spent an hour waiting for Fletcher, listening to the distant crackle of fireworks as the holiday wound down. Leopold was about to send out for sandwiches when Fletcher appeared with his list. "Here it is, Captain."

"Mr. and Mrs. Hugh April?"

"Nope—nothing close to it."

Leopold frowned. "Mr. and Mrs. Nelson August?"

"Nope."

"Well, stop standing there smiling and tell me!"

"Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Towne."

"Towne!" Leopold needed only a moment to recover himself. "Well, of course—he must have been their neighbor! That's how he knew about it. April did change his name, but Towne saw a picture of him somewhere and recognized him."

"Maybe," Fletcher said uncertainly.

"It has to be!"

The phone was ringing and Fletcher answered it. He listened a moment and then said, "We'll be right down."

"What is it, Fletcher?"

"The Coast Guard just fished a body out of the Sound. It could be Herbert Towne."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They had found the body wedged against a floating dock at the Yacht Club while they were preparing for a holiday fireworks display. Leopold and Fletcher reached the scene just as the police photographer was starting to work. The body was still on the dock, covered by a piece of dirty sailcloth.

Leopold lifted the cover and looked at the bloated little man underneath. "Check his pockets, Fletcher."

"Sure—I get all the good jobs!"

"Wallet?"

"Yeah." Fletcher held up a soggy piece of leather. "Money still in it."

"Driver's license?"

"No, but plenty of credit cards. It's Herbert Towne, all right."

"Any obvious wounds?"

"The blood's all washed away, but there could be something on the side of the head. Don't know if it was the cause of death, though. The waves could have battered him against the dock."

"Can we call the medical examiner in tonight?"

"It's the Fourth of July, Captain," Fletcher reminded him. "Doc's probably up at his place on the lake."

"First thing in the morning, then. Are we the only ones who work on holidays?"

"I guess so."

It was growing dark by the time they returned to headquarters. The occasional popping of firecrackers could still be heard, and Leopold wondered aloud where they all came from. "I thought there was a nationwide ban on them now."

"They bring 'em down from Canada, Captain. If we started arresting every person who sets off a firecracker we'd have the jail full in an hour."

Connie was waiting for them in the office. "Was it Towne?"

"It was Towne," Fletcher said. "April killed him in the motel room, pushed his body out the window, picked it up in his car, and then dumped it in the Sound. That's where he was all night."

Leopold dropped a coin into the coffee machine in the hall. "That's the trouble," he muttered. "It doesn't take all night to kill a man and dispose of the body. Hugh April was missing something like twenty hours in all. Where was he?"

"Maybe he started running and then changed his mind."

"What do you think, Captain?" Connie asked.

Leopold tasted the coffee and made a face. "I think none of us

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

should be working on the Fourth of July. Even the coffee's rotten tonight."

"Shall we bring April in for questioning?" Fletcher asked.

"Of course." Leopold turned to stare out the window. It was dark in the parking lot now.

"What's the matter, Captain?"

"There's something wrong with it, that's what's the matter. It doesn't add up. By staying away for all those hours the only thing he accomplished was to worry his wife so much she came to us."

"Let's bring him in, then."

Leopold changed his mind. "No, we'll go out there. Catch him off guard. He doesn't know we've found the body, and that's the one advantage we've got."

Martha April met them at the door, looking from Leopold's to Fletcher's face and then back again. "Do you really have to see him some more? He's not feeling well."

"That's what his partner told us. But he might be feeling worse after we talk to him."

"What do you mean?"

"Herbert Towne's body has been pulled out of the harbor."

Her hand went to her mouth, and they heard Hugh April's voice from the other room. "Who is it, Martha?"

"Captain Leopold. He insists on seeing you again."

"Have him come in, then."

Hugh April was seated in an easy chair, wearing an expensive dressing gown over pants and a open shirt—the wealthy publisher at home on the holiday.

"Sorry to bother you sir, but we've found Towne's body. It looks like foul play and of course that makes you a suspect."

"Oh?" He didn't seem alarmed, only amused.

"I think you'd better sit down, Mrs. April, while I explain this to your husband. It's a long story, and it begins about six years back, in Akron, Ohio."

"I know all about the dead child in the apartment basement, Captain. Remember, it was the subject of Towne's book."

"A book he wanted $50,000 for as an advance. Quite a large sum for an unknown author, wouldn't you say?"

"Definitely. We wouldn't have paid it."

"The thought occurs to me that a publisher's contract could serve as the perfect vehicle for a blackmail payment. Large sums

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of money are often advanced on the basis of a brief outline. Sometimes the finished work is never delivered, and occasionally publishers are unable to recover the advances in such cases. If Herbert Towne was blackmailing you, and demanded money on the pretext of selling you an uncompleted manuscript, there's no way it could be tagged as blackmail."

"Why would he blackmail me?"

"We've learned that Towne was a resident in the apartment house at the time that child was killed. We think he knew the parents and could identify them. Did you ever live in Ohio, Mr. April?"

It was Martha April who answered for him. "He's had this house for ten years. He bought it with his first wife and kept it after the divorce. He's lived here all that time."

Leopold turned to Hugh April. "Is that correct?"

"It certainly is—and the neighbors here can verify it. In fact, I've never even visited Ohio."

"I may have been mistaken," Leopold said slowly.

"Obviously you *were* mistaken," Martha April said. "I suggest you leave my husband alone if you have no further questions."

"But there's one other possibility that should be considered. If Herbert Towne didn't come to blackmail you, Mr. April, perhaps he came here to blackmail your wife. What was the name of your first husband, Mrs. April?"

The color had drained from her face and she took a step backward. "This is outrageous!"

"You came to us Saturday afternoon in the fear your husband had been murdered. Why? Because you knew that Herbert Towne had murdered before? Because you knew that Herbert Towne had murdered his own child? Because Herbert Towne was your first husband?"

"I—I—"

Leopold was talking fast now, watching her face. "He killed your son in a moment of anger, and the two of you hid the body in that trunk and moved away. Maybe memories of that hidden guilt prevented your new life with Towne from working out. In any event, you were divorced. Three years ago you married Hugh April, and somehow recently your former husband found out about it. He decided that a wealthy publisher wouldn't want his wife revealed as an accessory in the killing of her own child, so he came here with the blackmail scheme involving the book on communi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cation with the dead. Of course he had to get the truth across to your husband at some point in the negotiations last Friday night, and that was when the fatal fight must have broken out."

"You still think that Hugh killed Herbert Towne in that motel room?"

Leopold turned toward the tall man, but he wasn't fast enough. Hugh April had a revolver in his hand, covering Leopold and Fletcher. "Don't go for your guns," he said quietly. "That would be a mistake."

Leopold ignored the weapon and turned back to Martha April. "No," he said, "Hugh April didn't kill Herbert Towne, because this man is Herbert Towne, alive and ready to kill again. The body down at the morgue is your husband, Mrs. April—Hugh April."

Martha April stepped over to the tall man's side. "This is my husband, Captain, the only husband that matters. It was a mistake to ever divorce him."

"You seem to be two of a kind," Leopold said.

Herbert Towne gestured with the gun. "How'd you know who I was?"

"The body pulled out of the Sound had a wallet and credit cards, but no driver's license. Would Towne be staying at a motel ten miles out of the city if he couldn't even drive? Hardly—but then why was the driver's license taken when everything else was untouched? It could only be because a driver's license carries a description, however superficial, of its owner. If you were passing someone else's body off as your own, you couldn't leave your license.

"That got me thinking, and I remembered a newspaper article that described April and August as the Tweedledum and Tweedledee of publishing. The reference to a pair of identical fat little men in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* could hardly be missed. Now the partner, Nelson August, is indeed a fat little man, but you're tall and slim. When I remembered the bloated little body fished out of the Sound, it seemed more of a match for August than you do."

Leopold looked Herbert Towne in the eye. "You could claim self-defense in killing April. He probably took a sock at you when you tried that blackmail."

"Damned right!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And even the child could be manslaughter. But if you shoot us it's first-degree murder without any way out. Think about that."

"I've thought about it," Towne replied. "I thought about a lot of things Friday night and Saturday morning. I was halfway to Boston when I decided to come back for Martha. I couldn't leave her alone. Not after killing her husband."

"Considerate of you," Leopold said wryly. "She didn't turn you in the first time, so you figured she'd stick by you again. Even though you tried blackmail."

"I am sticking by him," Martha said. "He loves me."

Leopold scoffed. "He loves your dead husband's money. If he only decided to come back for you when he was halfway to Boston, why'd he switch wallets with the dead man? I'll tell you why—because once he'd killed Hugh April the rest of the scheme came to him at once. He'd dump the body, hoping it wouldn't be found for a few days, but switching wallets just in case it was. Then he'd con you into taking him back, the two of you would wait out the holiday weekend till the banks reopened tomorrow, and then you'd clean out the savings accounts and take off. Right?"

Martha didn't answer.

"Sure it's right!" Leopold kept on, hammering away at her. "Only he was late getting to you and you'd already run to the police, fearing what might have happened at that motel meeting. No great harm done, though. For us he became Hugh April, but for April's partner and anyone else who knew him he was ill and unavailable. It only had to last for a long weekend. Till the banks opened—right, Martha?"

"Yes," she admitted softly.

Towne must have guessed what was coming, because he tried to step away from her. But she grabbed his gun hand and pushed it down before he could step out of reach. "It's over, Herb," she said. "You're not going to kill them too."

Then Leopold and Fletcher were on him.

"One hell of a holiday," Leopold said later. "Is your party still going on, Fletcher?"

"I just called home, Captain. They're getting ready for the fireworks."

"Isn't that illegal?" Connie asked.

Leopold smiled at her. "Not with the police supervising. Come on, let's go."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TO: ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE,
P.O. Box 2640, Greenwich, CT 06830

☐ Send me 9 issues for only $6.97 ☐ Payment enclosed ☐ Bill me

☐ I prefer 18 issues for which I enclose $13.94.

*Name*_____

*Address*_____

*City*_____ *State*_____ *Zip*_____

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery of your first copy

H7H017

SPECIAL LIMITED-TIME OFFER FOR NEW SUBSCRIBERS ONLY

YOU MAY NEVER GET SO MUCH GREAT READING FOR SUCH A LOW PRICE AGAIN!

9 months of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE for only $6.97

—a saving of $3.53 over the regular subscription price.

Enjoy delicious hours in the world of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE—a world of challenging puzzles. Crime and retribution. Ingenious solutions.

The most widely read mystery magazine in the world! Published in several different languages.

The cream of the crime! EQMM is personally edited by Ellery Queen. Our writers are top-notch. Each monthly issue is a rich, 160-page anthology—averaging 11 new stories never before published—plus one distinguished reprint. By such masters as Eric Ambler, Agatha Christie, Rex Stout, Georges Simenon, Ross Macdonald, Dick Francis, Michael Gilbert, John D. Macdonald, Isaac Asimov, plus many talented newcomers.

Special Money-Saving Offer! The coupon brings you 9 exciting monthly issues for only 77 cents a copy. Or you may send $13.94 with your order for 18 issues, protecting yourself against highly probable subscription rate increases due to the ever rising cost of postage.

Order today! Save up to $7.06! And save other ways, too!

SUBSCRIBERS RECEIVE AT LEAST 20% OFF BOOKS IN OUR REVIEW SECTION

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified MARKET PLACE

The rate per word for Classified Ads is $1.00 each insertion, minimum ad $15.00—payable in advance. Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. Space reservations close 1st of 3rd month preceding COVER date. Send order & remittance to R. S. Wayner, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 229 Park Ave. South, New York, N.Y. 10003.

ADDITIONAL INCOME

YOU deserve extra income. New booklet tells how to get it. $1.50. Useful Gifts And Books (8A), 1540 Broadway (Suite 303), N.Y., NY 10036.

$200 WEEKLY mailing circulars. Samples 25¢. Grahamco DPBX 99371, Tacoma, WA 98499.

ANTIQUES, ARTS, CURIOS

INFORMATIVE 224 page antique buying guide, thousands of prices. Check Flea Market values. Order now. $2.85 includes postage and handling. Convenience Products, 12 Essex, Irvington, NJ 07111.

ATHLETIC EQUIPMENT & BODY BUILDING

CAN colds be prevented by vitamin C? Your benefit: good health through case histories, charts. Details free. PRETTY THINGS & KNICKNACKS. 400 E. 33rd 3503 Chicago, IL 60616.

BLUEPRINTS, PATTERNS & PLANS

NEW CRAFT PRINT CATALOG – Choose from over 100 great easy-to-build plans. Send $1.50 (completely refunded with your first order). BOAT BUILDER, (CP Div.)—229 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003.

BOOKS AND PERIODICALS

LARGE Catalog Free! Mystery-suspense books: Save to 70%. Spencer Books, P.O. Box 186, So. Laguna, CA 92677.

SPECIALISTS: Mystery—Detective Adventure, Fantasy, Science Fiction Hard Covered. Monthly Catalogues issued. Stephen's Book Service, P.O. Box 321, Kings Park, L.I., NY 11754.

RENT a mystery! Send for details. FREE catalogues. Detective-Mystery Booksearch, Box 15460, Orlando, FL 32808.

SEND for free catalogs of mystery and detective fiction. Canford Book Corral, Box 216E, Freeville, NY 13068.

FREE List! Used Hardcover Mystery-Detective Fiction. Dunn's Mysteries, 251 Baldwin Avenue, Meriden, CT 06450.

BOOKS Recent & Out Of Print. G & M Books, Pine Hill, Ogunquit, ME 03907.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

CLASSIC MYSTERY NOVELS the University of California extension has a new mystery program. Receive a $10.95 book free! For details, write Dept. G, Mystery Library, Box P, Del Mar, CA 92014.

LOVE a Mystery? Free Mystery-Detective book list. Mystery-House, Box 4235, Reading, PA 19606.

BRAND NEW—A quarterly science fiction magazine by Isaac Asimov. Send $5.40 for 4 issues (includes shipping & postage) to Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, 229 Park Ave. South, New York, NY 10003.

BOOK Readers and Collectors! Send titles wanted to: S&S Books, 80 North Wilder, E-51, St. Paul, MN 55104.

SCENE OF THE CRIME, The Mystery Bookshop. Catalog $1. 13636 Ventura Blvd., Sherman Oaks, CA 91423. Ring-213-981-CLUE.

PAPERBACKS GALORE – New Editions – Mysteries, Suspense, Gothics, Romance, Science Fiction, Adventure, Westerns, Non-fiction, etc. Save 40 to 60%. Free Catalog. Book Warehouse, Drawer 70, Lescron Enterprises, 80-88 Arch Street, Johnson City, NY 13790.

NICK CARTER FANS—Buy new books. Save 40 to 60%. 80 titles. Free catalog. Book Warehouse, Drawer 70, Lescron Enterprises, 80-88 Arch Street, Johnson City, NY 13790.

FREE discount lists; Books, manuals, folios. Fiction, occult, self-help, income opportunities, adult. ALMAJO BOOKS, Tony, WI 54563.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

MAKE Magnetic Signs. Big profits. Details, Universal, Lenora, KS 67645.

$30.00 HUNDRED Stuffing Our Circulars into Stamped Addressed Envelopes. Immediate Earnings. Beginners Kit $2.00 COLOSSI, 1433-61 Street, DC-7, Brooklyn, NY 11219.

HOMEWORK! BIG MONEY addressing, mailing envelopes. Exciting offer 10¢. Linco Services, 3636 Peterson, Chicago, 60659.

1000% PROFIT Bronzing Baby Shoes. Free Literature. NBC, Box 1904-DG, Sebring, FL 33870.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Continued

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

$3000.00 MONTHLY. Immediate income. Stuff envelopes at home. Information, send self-addressed stamped envelope. Cottage, Box 730-DFH, Baldwin Park, CA 91706.

$100 Day from $242 Machine. Brochure, Sample Product $1.00. Write, Coffman, 1973M Glenhaven, Abilene, Texas 79603.

"999 SUCCESSFUL LITTLE KNOWN BUSINESSES" information write, Gentry Distributors, Dept. DP, Box 511, Pascagoula, MS 39567.

$500.00 profit stuffing 1,000 envelopes. Details $1.00 (Refundable). Elamco, Bel337 D7, Waldo, AR 71770.

$25.00 DAILY possible stuffing envelopes! Details Free. Service, Box 715-D, Lynbrook, NY 11563.

COINS, CURRENCY & TOKENS

SPECIAL! WWII STEEL CENT SETS. 1943 PDS processed cents VFXF in holder only $1.25 plus .75¢ postage. Heritage Coins, P.O. Box 1372, Tulsa, OK 74101.

DETECTIVES

POLICE SECURITY INVESTIGATIVE schematics and equipment listings. Quimtronix, Box 548-DV, Seattle, WA 98111.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

SOMEWHERE west of Deadwood the outcasts are playing poker. The same one wins. The same ones lose. If you would win at poker, do this: Order the report, "How to win money playing poker." James L. Smith, RR 2, Dept. 11, Boonville, IN 47601.

FREE Information, Important recent publications of special interest to everyone. Money making, money saving, self improvement. Most $2 or less. Send today, Elan, P.O. Box 117, Richfield, WI 53076.

FARMS, ACREAGE & REAL ESTATE

SELLING YOUR HOME? Don't . . . Until you learn to sell it yourself. 101 Easy to Follow Steps. Save Thousands $$$ in Broker's Fees! Send $2, ELAN, P.O. Box 117 B1, Richfield, WI 53076.

CABIN, stoves, 7.8 acres pine, on lake, N.W. Wis., Box 181 Williams Bay, WI 53191.

GAMES, TOYS & ENTERTAINMENT

IGNORE ANNOYING TELEVISION COMMERCIALS. Amazing klicker kills audio across room. Quick installation $3.00. RCG, Box 135-B, Dresher, PA 19025.

GIFTS THAT PLEASE

LOW PRICED specialty items. GREAT as party favors, gifts etc. FREE details. CATALOG SALES, 7831 224th Northeast, Redmond, WA 98052.

GIFTS THAT PLEASE—Cont'd

FREE: Drop a card for fantastic bargains to Oak "N" Ledge, Greene, RI 02827.

FREE Bargain Catalog quality items for all uses write T.J.'s Popular Products, Box 702-D, Milpitas, CA 95035.

HYPNOTISM

FREE Fascinating Hypnosis Information! Startling! DLMH, Box 487 Anaheim, CA 92805.

MAGIC TRICKS

DISCOUNT Magic Catalog 25¢. Huge savings! Magic & Fun Discount Center, Box 1936-AZ, N.Y., NY 10017.

MISCELLANEOUS

WIN Bingo! New method. Details free! Research-730, Box 669, Burbank, CA 91503.

LOCK PICKING—much more—books & SUPPLIES. Send $2.00 to: Landis, 625 Post St., Box 1048, San Francisco, CA 94109.

FIRST prizes $250,00. Play, win legal lottery, total $2,400,000 prizes. Low cost tickets $6.00, send cash only to Louis Whitfield, 1102 Edith S.E., Albuquerque, NM 87102.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

HOW to make money writing short paragraphs. Information free. Barrett, Dept. C-499-A, 6216 N. Clark, Chicago 60660.

FREE "1001 ODDS"! $10,000-$100,000 actually made at home! Never get over it! Publico, Carlsbad, CA 92008.

$3 Hourly stuffing envelopes. Easy work. Details free. Feldco, Box 228 Ryder, Brooklyn 11234.

$500.00 WEEKLY! IMMEDIATE, Guaranteed home income stuffing envelopes. FREE Supplies! Send 25¢, Stamp. Profits, B725-DP8, Belen, NM 87002.

$1000 MONTHLY POSSIBLE, mailing commission letters. Information—Free! OPPORTUNITIES Box 721D, Lynbrook, NY 11563.

$250.00 PROFIT / THOUSAND possible STUFFING MAILING ENVELOPES! Offer: Rush stamped addressed envelope—Kings-KDV X21487 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316.

BIG Sparetime Income, Mailing. Fiesta, Box 2882, DP, Springfield, IL 62708.

$250.00 profit/thousand possible-stuffing-mailing envelopes. Offer: Rush stamped addressed envelope: Universal-ADVS X16180 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Continued

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

MAKE YOUR CLASSIFIED AD PAY. Get "How to Write A Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth $2.00 towards a classified ad in this publication. Send $1.50 (includes postage) to R. S. Wayner, Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 229 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003.

I make $52,000 yearly mailing letters. Anyone can. Free proof. Sandco-DP, Ceres, CA 95307.

$300.00 WEEKLY. Mailing Circulars. Write: MCGUIRE, Box 144, Tacoma, WA 98412.

NEW! Stuff our circulars for profit. Free details. Seafern, 4567 Park, San Diego, CA 92116.

HARD work and a small investment scare you? If you don't believe in "getting rich overnight" write: Regal, 10835 SE Powell Blvd. #35, Portland, OR 97266.

$250 WEEKLY possible mailing letters. Free details. Atco, Box 27, Sioux Falls, SD 57101.

ROULETTE, New Secret System, Astounding Results! Tested Years. $9.85 Financial Systems, P.O. Box 35243, Phoenix, AZ 85069.

$1,000 MONTHLY possible stuffing envelopes. Free details. G.W., Box 338, Orangeville, Ontario, Canada L9W 2Z7.

$500 WEEKLY with MAIL ORDERS MOST DYNAMIC PROGRAM. FREE details, Box 1912, Fort Worth, Texas 76101.

OF INTEREST TO WOMEN

$1,000 short story/poetry contest. National magazine. Send self-addressed, stamped envelope for information. Contest-DP, Box 22248, Sacramento, CA 95822.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Identity, Box 315-DC, Royal Oak, MI 48068.

JAPANESE introduction! Girl's photographs, descriptions, brochure, details. $1.00 INTER-PACIFIC, Box 304-SC, Birmingham, MI 48012.

DATES GALORE! Meet singles-anywhere. Call DATELINE, toll-free (800) 451-3245.

JAPANESE Girls Make Wonderful Wives. We have large number of listings. Many interested in marriage. Only $1.00 brings application, photos, names, descriptions, questionnaire, Etc. Japan International, Box 156-AA, Carnelian Bay, CA 95711.

BEAUTIFUL Mexican-Oriental girls Needing American Boy-Friends. Free Details, "actual" photos. World, Box 3876-DC, San Diego, CA 92103.

PERSONAL—Cont'd

500 Ladies, 350 Men Photos Matrimonial Catalog, $1.00 Contactpartner: Box 12, Toronto, Canada M4A 2M8.

LOTO CANADA—World's Largest Lottery. $32,000,000 in prizes. Next draw October 9. Each ticket offers 12 chances to win $1,000,000. 150,000 winners. Tickets $10 plus $1.50 fee. Send check to Bridge International, Box 35301, Vancouver, V6M 4G5 Canda.

"ADULT" Books-Magazines, 40¢ up. Free Brochures. (State Age). Bargain Books, Box 7041-AL, Richmond, Virginia 23221.

"DATE WITH DIGNITY" Professional Matching. Drawer 6765. Fort Worth, 76115 (817) 921-0281 Anytime.

LATIN AMERICAN GIRLS appreciate their men. Let us introduce you to a dark-eyed, unspoiled beauty. Complete application package and photo selection $2.00: Maria Garcia, Box 80801D, San Diego, Calif. 92138.

BEAUTIFUL MEXICAN GIRLS! Friendship, *marriage. Photos information free!* "Latins," Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

ADULT PRODUCTS. Giant Catalog $1.00 (Refundable). Trader Jack, 1045 Tabor Ave., Fairfield, CA 94533.

PHOTOGRAPHY-PHOTO FINISHING & SUPPLIES

SAVE HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS!!! Make your own *S&M Densitometer. Send* $3.00 for details, drawings and instructions. A must for successful photography in your darkroom. Order direct: S&M Instruments, Dept. EQ8, 229 Park Ave. South, N.Y. NY 10003.

PRINTING, MIMEOGRAPHING & MULTIGRAPHING

WHOLESALE, Printing Office Supplies, Equipment, Free Catalog, Atlantic, DP-8, Box 1678, Florence, South Carolina *29503.*

RADIO-TV

FANTASTIC old radio programs on tape. Reels, cassettes, 8-track. Free introductory catalog. Radio Memories, Box 2297, Newport News, VA 23602.

SURPLUS EQUIPMENT

GIANT Bargain Packed Canadian Surplus Catalogs $1.00. Etco Electronics-DG, Box 741, Montreal "A."

TAPES, RECORDERS, SOUND EQUIPMENT

OLD MYSTERY & DETECTIVE radio shows on tape. Low as $1.75 per hour. Catalog $1.00. Phantom Empire, 8225 Kingsbrook, #116, Houston, Tex. 77024.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

15 BEST-SELLING MYSTERIES FOR JUST $1

Worth $100.80 in Publishers' Editions!

J. J. Marric.
Gideon's Drive
Publ. Ed. $6.95
Erle Stanley Gardner.
The Case of the
Postponed Murder
Publ. Ed. $5.95
Lillian O'Donnell.
Leisure Dying
Publ. Ed. $6.95
Agatha Christie.
Hallowe'en Party
Publ. Ed. $4.95
John D. MacDonald.
A Purple Place for Dying
Publ. Ed. $7.95
Agatha Christie.
Endless Night
Publ. Ed. $4.50
Sjöwall & Wahloo.
The Terrorists
Publ. Ed. $7.95
Erle Stanley Gardner.
The Case of the
Fenced-In Woman
Publ. Ed. $5.95
Mignon Eberhart.
Family Fortune
Publ. Ed. $7.95
Georges Simenon.
Maigret and the
Apparition
Publ. Ed. $7.95
Erle Stanley Gardner.
The Case of the
Irate Witness
Publ. Ed. $4.95
Len Deighton.
Catch a Falling Spy
Publ. Ed. $7.95
Ellery Queen.
A Fine and Private Place
Publ. Ed. $5.95
Agatha Christie.
Nemesis
Publ. Ed. $5.95
Dick Francis.
In The Frame
Publ. Ed. $8.95

Please enroll me as a member and send me at once my five triple-volumes shown here, containing fifteen mysteries. I enclose no money now. I may examine my books for one week, then will either accept all five volumes for the special new member price of only $1, plus postage and handling, or return them and owe nothing.

As a member, I will receive free the club's monthly Preview which describes my next selections but I am not obligated to accept them. I will always have at least ten days to reject any volume by returning the form provided. I may return any book at the club's expense for full credit. For each monthly triple-volume I keep, I will send you only $4.39, plus postage and handling. I understand I may cancel my membership at any time.

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, ROSLYN, N.Y. 11576

Name _____

Street _____

7-MQ

City _____

15-56-7D

State _____ Zip _____

Note: Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Ontario, offer slightly different in Canada.

WORTH $100.80 IN PUBLISHERS' EDITIONS. DETAILS ON OTHER SIDE.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

15 Best-Sellers for Just $1.00

THE BIGGEST BRIBE IN THE HISTORY OF CRIME

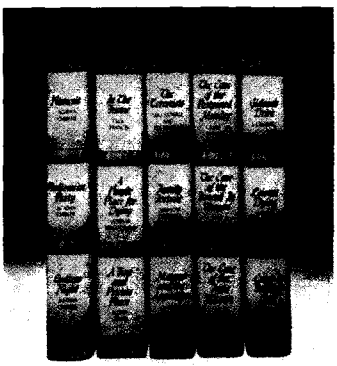
Worth $100.80 in Publishers' Editions!

Now's the time to take advantage of the most generous mystery book offer ever: 15 full-length novels, including some of the finest mystery writing to appear in recent years, for just $1.

You'll get the brand-new Dick Francis thriller, *In The Frame*. Best-selling classic adventures of Perry Mason, Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, and Ellery Queen. Plus new mysteries by Len Deighton, Georges Simenon, Mignon Eberhart, John D. MacDonald and more!

These spine-thrilling mysteries would cost $100.80 in their publishers' editions. But you can get all 15 of them, in five handsome hardbound triple-volumes, for only $1 as your introduction to The Detective Book Club.

As a member, you'll get free the Club's monthly *Preview* which describes in advance each month's selections. They're chosen by the Club's editors who select the best from more than 400 mysteries published each year. You may reject any volume before or after receiving it; there is no minimum number of books you must buy. And you may cancel your membership at any time.



When you accept a club selection, you get three complete, unabridged detective novels in one hardcover triple-volume like the ones shown on this page for only $4.39. That's $3, $4, or $5 less than one mystery would cost nowadays in the publisher's original edition.

Recent selections have included new thrillers by top names like those featured above plus Brian Garfield, Richard Lockridge, Anne Morice, and many others. Start enjoying the benefits of membership in The Detective Book Club. Send no money now. You'll be billed later for your 15 mysteries. Send the post-paid card today to: The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, N.Y. 11576.

First Class
Permit No. 7
Roslyn, N.Y.

Business Reply Mail
No postage stamp necessary
if mailed in the United States

Postage will be paid by

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

Roslyn, N.Y. 11576

MAIL THIS POSTAGE-FREE CARD TODAY.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED